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SEASON ONE

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Emissary”

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“Emissary” (season 1, episodes 1-2; originally aired 1/3/1993)

In which Benjamin Sisko loses a wife, but gains a wormhole

Benjamin Sisko is an angry man. There are a lot of those on TV these days, so maybe that doesn't sound so important anymore, but it's worth repeating: Benjamin Sisko is damn near furious. Jean-Luc Picard wasn't exactly the friendliest man in the world in the first episode of [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#), but he was more uncomfortable and irritable than outright mad. James T. Kirk, from the original [Star Trek](#) was an all around chummy dude. Now we have our new commander for our new series, and he's black, which is a small but significant change of pace. He's also really, really pissed off.

He has his reasons. He's the first *Trek* lead we've had with a legitimately Tragic Past: his wife, Jennifer, died three years ago. Worse, she died during the Borg's devastating attack on the Federation, an attack led by Locutus, a.k.a. the briefly assimilated Captain Picard. “Emissary” tries to make some hay out of this in the two semi-confrontational scenes between Sisko and Picard (included mostly so *Deep Space Nine* could get some proximity-mojo from the then-airing *TNG*), and it's not one of the pilot's stronger gambits; Sisko does barely restrained resentment well enough, but there's no real place for that resentment to go, dramatically speaking. Anyone familiar enough with Picard to know the resolution of [“Best Of Both Worlds”](#) already knows how he suffered for it, and how little any of what happened was his fault; if you don't know *TNG* history, it's unlikely you'll be much enthused by a protagonist growling politely at a barely relevant guest star.

Still, while Sisko's issues with Picard aren't all that compelling, the obvious discomfort the man feels within the framework of the Federation is important. Sisko isn't precisely an outsider, but, as he explains to Picard early on, he begins this episode nearly convinced he should leave Starfleet for good and take up the civilian life back on Earth. It's not exactly surprising when he changes his mind before the end credits, because spending an hour and a half introducing a protagonist, only to have him wave goodbye forever before episode two, isn't good TV writing. But it's important that he was thinking about quitting, because it sets a certain tone. Captains Kirk and Picard were defined by their commitment, and their loyalty to the *Enterprise*. Sisko is not, at least not yet. This indicates a basic shift in intention that runs throughout the entirety of "Emissary." The people we meet here (most of whom aren't actually "people" in the traditional sense) aren't uniformly happy, or satisfied with their jobs, or excited to be working together. Sisko isn't the only angry member of the cast, and the tension these various frustrations create when they collide against each other shows promise. Up until now, *Star Trek* has focused on individuals coming together for a purpose greater than themselves. *DS9* will most likely still be about this to some extent, but this is a disparate ensemble; each person in it has their own goals, and their own needs. Great drama comes from the opposition of understandable viewpoints, and there's a lot of potential present in this episode. If only we didn't spend so much time getting all *mystical*.

"Emissary" is a pilot episode, and "pilot episodes" tend to bring a certain amount of baggage along with them. This one runs double the size of a regular episode, and much of its length is given over to the usual table-setting one finds in a series premiere. We meet our ensemble, we establish the primary setting, we introduce potential conflicts, some of which will pay off in later episodes, some of which will most likely be forgotten before the end of the season. There's a story arc that helps bring everyone together in the face of a common enemy, a temporary cooperation which, while not precluding arguments and contention down the line, at least indicates that our heroes are capable of working together, even if they don't always want to. "Emissary" debuted in 1993, right around the middle of *TNG*'s sixth season, and there's a level of professionalism right off the bat which wasn't present in *TNG*'s first episode, ["Encounter At Farpoint."](#) Where "Farpoint" had to both re-introduce *Trek* to television after a 20 year absence, as well as convince an audience they could enjoy *Trek* without Kirk or Spock or the rest, *DS9* comes to us in a world where all of this is basically a given. By 1993, the *Trek*-verse was an established commodity, which meant it was time to start bending the line.

That confidence shows, and while it's clear these actors will get more comfortable with their roles as time goes by, there's a gratifying lack of the sort of clumsiness that typified early *TNG*. "Emissary"'s plot, at least the non-Emissary elements, works in a standard nuts-and-bolts, let's see how these underdogs can kick a bit of ass kind of way. Sisko arrives at the station, and he learns from Chief Miles O'Brien (Colm Meaney, a cast-off from *TNG*, and a smart choice for this show; O'Brien was a welcome presence on Picard's *Enterprise*, but he was rarely given much to do) that the Cardassians wrecked up the place before they left. Sisko's first officer, Major Kira (Nana Visitor) is a Bajoran with an understandable chip on her shoulder, and truth be told, hardly anyone on the station is all that excited

to have a new Federation representative to boss them around. On top of that, the Cardassians, who are tricky bastards to say the least, haven't exactly "left;" they lurk at the edges of the quadrant, just waiting for an excuse to swoop in and start shooting. After the comparative stability of *TNG* (where bad things happened, but there was always a status quo to return to), *DS9* gives us a world that needs more than speeches and idealism to get back on the right track.

I have a few minor complaints with "Emissary," and one big one. The small stuff is to be expected in a pilot. The dialogue is heavy-handed in spots, and some of the performances aren't quite there yet. I like Avery Brooks as Sisko, but there's an occasional awkwardness to his work, like he isn't quite sure where to put his feet. In his defense, he's asked to do a lot of heavy lifting over the course of the hour and a half, and Sisko is, at times, supposed to be a bit crazed. I realize Kira is an intense character by nature, but Visitor's intensity can border on hysteria, and Alexander Siddig's Bashir is almost a non-entity. It's difficult to introduce a cast this large without a certain level of "Let's stop and explain ourselves," though, and while it's not perfect, there are no obvious weak links here to give me concerns about the weeks ahead.

For much of its first season, *TNG* relied heavily on Patrick Stewart's talent and presence to help carry an inexperienced and unproven cast, but *DS9*'s ensemble is fairly deep even on first introduction. Brooks is, essentially, good; I already know Siddig gets more to do as the show goes on; and while Visitor is corny in spots, I appreciate her passion. I especially appreciate that the show has two strong female characters right off the bat, which is something *Trek* has often struggled with in its many incarnations. Terry Farrell's Dax carries herself with the appropriate self-assurance of a creature who's been alive (in some form or another) for a very long time; Rene Auberjonois does excellent work under a lot of make-up as the ambiguously specied Odo, Deep Space Nine's law man and resident sour-puss (he even mostly sells the incredibly awkward, "I HAVE A MYSTERIOUS PAST" info dump); and Armin Shimerman is the first Ferengi I've seen who isn't immediately awful. In fact, I found Quark to be fun right off the bat. He may be greedy and treacherous as Ferengi so often are, but he wasn't sniveling or cowardly, and this is clearly a show that enjoys having as much gray area as it can. And of course Colm Meaney is great. He's always great. I even liked him in *Con Air*.

These are fascinating individuals, and while none of them are perfectly drawn, we get enough sense of their various drives and insecurities to make me eager to watch them bounce off one another. My biggest reservation about "Emissary" isn't the cast, then, or the meat-and-potatoes nature of much of the writing. My problem is with the part of the story that gives the episode its title, the revelation that Commander Sisko is a prophesied connection between the people of Bajor and a group of aliens living inside a nearby wormhole. For the first 20 or so minutes, "Emissary" moves along at a decent clip, a bit rough around the edges, a trifle clumsy, but clearly setting down the necessary tracks to get things rolling. Then Sisko has to go meet up with the Bajoran religious leader Kai Opaka, and she shows him the Tear of the Prophet, and things go a bit pear-shaped.

It's not that this is awful, exactly. It's just unnecessary. Sisko already had his hands full dealing with the problems inherent in taking over command of Deep Space Nine. He didn't need a lot of mystical

claptrap, including long-form flashbacks and extensive debates over the nature of time. We don't need it, either. The best parts of *DS9*'s first episode take some of *TNG*'s strongest conceits—the importance of consequences, the difficulties in negotiating strong relationships between different species with different ideals—and expand on them, without shying away from the darker side of politicking and compromise. The greatness isn't there yet, but there are hints of it throughout, most notably in the fact that this is a show about sticking around after the adventures are over, and after the ambassadors have left. The Federation is considering Bajor for membership, and now it's up to Sisko to hang out with a few other officers and try to rebuild with some locals who are understandably suspicious of outsiders. There's a rawness there which speaks to Q's trial of humanity in "Encounter At Farpoint;" will these individuals learn to rise above their prejudices and fears and become a functioning unit? And even if they do, will that be enough to weather the trials ahead?

That's exciting stuff, and watching Sisko negotiate the backroom deals necessary to get Deep Space Nine up and running again sold me on the show far more thoroughly than the 20-minute discussion of memory and linear progression the Commander had with the wormhole aliens. Sisko's efforts to uncover the mystery of the magical orbs, and his interactions with the beings who sent those orbs, are the weakest part of the episode, because it's all very silly and inert, and because it fits so neatly into our expectations of what television science fiction is "supposed" to be. Character drama is set to one side so an outside force can swoop in and force our leading man to deal with his issues. The sequences with Kira and O'Brien attempting to bluff a superior Cardassian force are thrilling, and help establish that this space station is not the weapons powerhouse that the *Enterprise* was. The sequences with Sisko using baseball to explain why humans don't know what happens next are... actually, they're sort of fun, but they aren't necessary, and every time the show shifts its focus, it feels like we're losing sight of everything that made *DS9* such a breath of fresh air in the first place.

Yet hope remains. Of all the Trek pilots I've seen (all three of them), *DS9* is the one most rife with possibility. The setting is unusual, and cast is strong, and the conflicts are there; everything just needs a little more flesh. I'm not sold on Sisko as a "chosen one," but I recognize the plot possibilities the wormhole brings to the series. I also appreciate the sense, right from the start, that this is a story which isn't going to be resolved any time soon. I don't want to spend the next seven seasons watching Sisko teach memory jumping morons, but I do appreciate the already inherent assumption that events on *DS9* will be on-going. No reset buttons here, no convenient forgetting or warp drive. *TNG* dabbled in serialization, but *DS9* is set to embrace it. We get to see what happens next. I, for one, can't wait.

Stray observations:

- Welcome to TV Club Classic's coverage of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999), the third *Trek* series, and the first not to take place on some version of the starship *Enterprise*. Or any starship at all, in fact—*DS9* is set on the titular space station, a former Cardassian outpost orbiting the planet Bajor which has come into Federation hands. Some of you have been following along with my *Trek* reviews since I covered the original series, or else joined up when we took a look at *TNG*; welcome back, good to have you on board again, help yourself to the

cake. Some of you may be new here, and if so, happy to have you as well. This should be an interesting experience for me, because unlike the original *Trek* and *TNG*, I know very little about *DS9*. I'm familiar with the characters, I've seen a handful of episodes, but while I've heard the series praised for its serialization and intensity, I haven't experienced enough of it first hand to really know what I'm getting myself into. Which, after spending about three years covering various Trek-related topics, has me pretty stoked.

- You'll notice there's no grade for this episode. I've decided to drop them for the duration, as grading is nearly always stressful, and hardly ever relevant.
- Odd seeing Picard in the role of the unwanted authority here, although he had played the part a few times on his own show. He seems a little sad.
- It's a small detail, but I love how even the temperature controls on the station aren't working right.
- The actress who plays Sisko's wife, Jennifer, isn't very good. So maybe he should be thanking Picard, eh? Eh?
- "Shields up!" "What shields?"

Next week: We check out "Past Prologue" and visit "A Man Alone."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "Past Prologue"/"A Man Alone"

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"Past Prologue" (season 1, episode 3; originally aired 1/10/1993)

In which an old friend returns, and a new friend cuts right to the point...

I may not know everything about *DS9*, but I know enough to recognize an important recurring character when I see him. Andrew Robinson (best known as the Scorpio Killer in *Dirty Harry*, and the most miserable cuckold ever in *Hellraiser*) makes his debut appearance in "Past Prologue" as Garak, a Cardassian tailor who is almost certainly more than he seems. Garak is striking from his first scene, which also happens to be the first scene of the episode; he sits down with Dr. Bashir, introduces himself in a manner which can only be described as "playfully aggressive" (with emphasis on the latter), and sets to making friends. Partly it's the script, which gives Garak ample opportunities to play up his ambiguity, and partly it's Robinson. At this point, Garak is more idea than fully-formed character, but the actor manages to hit a note of intensity which is at once weirdly sexual *and* asexual. The Cardassian isn't hitting on Bashir, not exactly, but there's a flirtation, and a sense of an old pro putting the moves on a naive, well, virgin. Their developing "relationship" isn't the centerpiece of "Past Prologue," but it's indicative once again of *DS9*'s willingness to keep people on their toes. Garak is a Cardassian, and Cardassians are not to be trusted; what's more, he's a spy, and spies are dangerous, treacherous folks. Except, he helps connect Bashir (and by extension Sisko and the rest of the main crew) to the relationship between a recently arrived Bajoran terrorist and the Duras sisters, a connection which proves crucial to preventing the terrorist from carrying out his plans. And yet, we don't know why Garak decided to help. We don't know anything at all, really.

This sense of uncertainty, and of the necessary effort required to forge safe ground in hostile territory, pervades both of this week's episodes. After being warned repeatedly that the first season or two (or three) of *DS9* is uneven, I was surprised at how consistent "Past Prologue" and "A Man Alone" are. Neither are mind-blowing, of course, and if this was later in the show's run, if I'd heard higher praise, or if I'd watched these when they originally aired and had my expectations based off of *TNG*'s success, I might be inclined to judge more harshly. But viewed as a show that's still finding its legs, *DS9* has a lot of confidence, and a clear sense of the kind of stories it wants to tell. Those stories aren't exactly subtle yet, and they aren't as complex or effective as they could be, but the details are less important in the early going than the characters and the world they inhabit. What we see in both these episodes, as heavy-handed and clunky as they often are, is the station of Deep Space Nine and the people who inhabit it coming into existence.

Out of the two, "Past Prologue" works the best overall. It's a plot you can see coming from the moment Kira was introduced in "Emissary." Kira is passionate, devoted to her people, and she used to be a member of the resistance, fighting back against the Cardassian oppressors. Now she's taking a role in the burgeoning Bajoran government, and working to help bridge the gap between Bajor and the Federation. She has understandably mixed feelings about this. She and others like her fought long and hard to secure Bajor's freedom, and the hegemonic nature of the Federation is bound to make anyone with a strong sense of national (planetary?) identity skittish. However, the Cardassians are still lurking in the margins, ready to take advantage of even the slightest show of weakness, which means Bajor needs the Federation—and the massive resources and manpower it can provide—around. This means Kira is going to be a bit suspicious of Sisko from the start, as well as resentful of the fact that she has to take orders from someone who wasn't around when her friends were dying. It also means, as we see in "Prologue," that people from Kira's old life are going to show up occasionally. People with their own agenda, who aren't on-board with being friendly with outsiders, and who is more than willing to call Kira's loyalty into question, especially if it serves their aims.

That last bit is the tricky part. Stories of divided loyalty are a delicate balance, and it's a highwire act that's even more difficult to maintain when a main character in an ongoing television series is the one in the middle. Back on *TNG*, Ro Laren (Michelle Forbes) faced a similar sort of crisis as Kira does in ["Preemptive Strike,"](#) but there, Ro was a sort of special guest star; she'd appeared in a handful of episodes, which meant that she was recognizable, but her choices on the show weren't defined by a need to keep her in the same space (so to speak) as the rest of the ensemble. This meant that when Ro was asked to spy on a group of freedom fighters, she found they were good people, and that their goals were much the same as hers. It also meant that when the push came to shove, Ro sided with the freedom fighters, abandoning her position in Starfleet and engendering the rare "disappointment face" from her mentor, Picard. This was possible because, again, Ro wasn't a regular. (It was also possible because *TNG* was coming to the end of its seventh and last season, so why the hell not.)

Kira, though, is a regular, and while theoretically the show could pull a fast one and ditch her in the early going, it wouldn't really work; we're too close to the start for that kind of sucker punch to have much effect, and *Trek*, even edgy *Trek*, isn't big on rug-pulling-out-from-under-ing. This means that if

Kira faces someone from her past, someone who makes her wonder where her real loyalties lie, there has to be a narrative reason for her to end up reaffirming her status quo by the conclusion. There are different ways to do this, but the easiest way is for the person who inspires all this self-doubt—in this case, Tahna Los, a member of the Kohn Ma terrorist organization—to be demonstrably foolish or out and out corrupt. If Tahna, for all his high-minded lectures, turns out to be a greedy bully or an idiot, Kira can go on her merry way of shouting at Sisko, but still, basically, doing what he tells her to do.

The problem is, if Tahna is too corrupt, it makes the whole storyline absurd. And it is so tempting to make him a flat out asshole, because by doing so, not only is Kira let off the hook, the rest of the good guys look even better by comparison. A well-meaning writer could make Tahna a once idealistic warrior who has turned to crime in the wake of the Cardassian departure, frustrated that he's never been officially recognized as a hero by the current government and determined to get his fair share of what he assumes is the immense wealth the arrival of the Federation has made available. Then we could have a big, grouchy speech about being left out or abandoned or whatever, and Kira could arrest him with a clear conscience (or get Odo to arrest him) and move on. It would neat, clean, and utterly predictable.

Instead, we get something close to that, but not exactly that. Tahna is still fighting the good fight, but Kira isn't sure it's quite so good anymore. He arrives at Deep Space Nine on the run from some very unhappy Cardassians; he requests political asylum, which Sisko temporarily grants. (This surprised me. I expected much of the episode to focus on Kira and Sisko arguing about the best way to deal with Tahna's past crimes, but Sisko is mostly secondary here, and the choices he makes are, basically, the only choices he can make. Before Tahna's true colors are revealed, it wouldn't be very smart for a Starfleet officer trying to establish diplomatic relations with a foreign body to hand over one of that body's citizens to their sworn enemies, whatever sins he's committed.) Kira is excited to see an old colleague—and one whom she clearly respects, even idolizes—but he's less than impressed, telling her she's changed, and that she's turned into an appeaser, and so on. He tries to guilt her into helping him carry out a plan to rid Bajor of the Federation, but Kira realizes he's up to something.

There's a lot to like here. I appreciate that Kira's decision is made without a lot of hand-wringing on her part. Sure, she's upset and none too happy about what she has to do, but as soon as she figures out that Tahna knew she'd be on the station, and had been planning on exploiting her all along, she understands she can't go along with him. What's also nice is that she doesn't immediately go to Sisko with this information, instead paying a visit to Odo for moral advice. This helps establish their friendship, and reinforces the idea that Odo is a straight shooter. It's also great that Tahna turns out to be telling basically the truth when he assures Kira no one will get hurt in his plan: he just wants to use a massively powerful bomb to collapse the wormhole. Admittedly, the wormhole aliens might not enjoy this, and who knows what kind of effect a bomb that big would have on the sector as a whole, but it's not like he's a psychopath who intends to murder thousands to prove his point. He's moral in his way, it's just that his goals aren't really in keeping with what's best for Bajor in the long run. Tahna is a single-minded individual, which means he can accomplish amazing things; it also means he's worse than useless in a society which needs compromise to survive.

As for failings, well, great as Garak is, Bashir is a bit of a twerp through most of his scenes, repeatedly failing to pick up on the tailor's obvious clues. I don't mind if the good doctor isn't up on his espionage, but there's no need for him to be an idiot, especially not the kind of overly childish idiot he appears to be here. Using the Duras Sisters as Tahna's Klingon contacts is a silly way to try and remind us that *DS9* is connected to *TNG*; the characters are appropriate enough for narrative purposes, but a new Klingon would've done the job just as well, and not given *Trek* fans the weird feeling that the universe only has about 20 people in it.

Even without these issues, "Prologue" still wouldn't be a great episode. It's good, by and large, and it serves the purpose of establishing some of Kira's history, and reaffirming her position on the station, but there's a certain bloodless formality to it that keeps it from being as consistently powerful as it is in its few best moments. Maybe the biggest problem here is there's still a sense of too much safety—as much as I appreciate the gray area Tahna represents, and Kira's struggle against temptation, the Federation is there to pick up all the pieces at the end, with Sisko and Dax standing by in case things get out of hand. Still, Tahna gets the last word here, hissing "Traitor" at Kira before being led away in manacles, and that at least indicates that this is a show that's willing to put its leads in uncomfortable places. It just needs to get more willing to embrace the discomfort. Both episodes we're looking at this week are streets ahead of *TNG*'s early years, but "Prologue" makes you want them to farther. Maybe check what's down a few of the darker alleys, just to see who's waiting.

Stray observations:

- For some reason, Netflix had these two episodes out of order, and I ended up watching "A Man Alone" first. It doesn't matter very much here—but if you're following along online, watch out for future episode-jumbling.
- Dax barely exists here, and what's troubling (at least in terms of her character) was that I didn't realize how little she was a part of everything until she popped up halfway through the episode.
- The episode doesn't go out of its way to endear us to Kira. When Sisko doesn't give her exactly what she wants, she goes over his head to a Starfleet admiral. (Whose none too pleased about the intrusion.) Still, I like her. I find Nana Visitor charming, and there's something endearingly dorky about her enthusiasm. She's not an idiot like Bashir, she's just an idealist who actually won the war she was fighting, and now has to deal with the cost of victory.

"A Man Alone" (season 1, episode 2; originally aired 1/17/1993)

In which Odo battles the Clonus horror

Every *Trek* needs its outsider. The original series had Spock, a half-human, half-Vulcan whose commitment to stoicism frequently put him at odds with his more emotionally driven crewmates. *TNG* had Data, an android whose main goal in life was to become more "human," which meant he spent a lot of time on the show wandering around commenting on other characters' behavior; that's not the

easiest way to fit in. And now, we have Odo, a shape-shifting constable who, as he helpfully explained in the pilot, has no idea where he came from, what his species is, or if there's anyone else like him in the universe. To the good: Odo is played by Rene Auberjonois, a talented character actor you might remember from such movies as *MASH* and *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*. To the bad: There's something more than a little contrived about the character's murky backstory. Spock was a Starfleet officer, and, while his mixed-race background made him something of an anomaly, he wasn't a singular event in the universe. Data was a bit more special, but he's a robot, and you expect the occasional robot on a science-fiction show. But Odo is so unusual, he might be the only one of him there is! Not only that, he can actually change his shape into anything he wants. We could get an explanation for all this later (I actually suspect we will, and it probably has something to do with those pesky wormhole aliens), but for right now, he's basically just magic, and given how grounded the rest of *DS9* is, that makes him a little suspect.

"A Man Alone" takes the "suspect" aspect quite literally, with a silly murder mystery that puts Odo in the hot seat for no other reason than to remind us that everyone, everywhere, fears the unknown. Like "Prologue," "Man" puts in some effort to establish Deep Space Nine as a dangerous place, full of different races and less than savory individuals, but unlike the former episode, the latter spreads its focus over a number of different subplots of varying importance. The murder mystery is the primary focus, because a corpse tends to draw the focus, and also because it allows the time for a lot of angry mobs and Odo being persecuted and so forth. But there's also Keiko (Mrs. Chief O'Brien) and her efforts to start a school on the space station, which dovetail with Jake Sisko's brief foray into pranking with his Ferengi buddy, Nog. And there's also the brief love triangle (which threatens to pop up again, sadly) of Bashir, Dax, and Sisko. This may not sound like much, but "A Man Alone" does a decent job weaving these storylines together in a way that helps to establish our sense of the space station as a definite location. Three episodes in, and I'm actually more comfortable with the geography of Deep Space Nine than I ever really was with the *Enterprise-D*.

In terms of its function within the season as a whole, then, "A Man Alone" serves a purpose. But as an actual episode of television, it falls short, relying too much on contrivance and cliché rather than allowing the characters room to breathe. The best plot is, surprisingly, Keiko's decision to start a school. Sure, the stakes are low, and the only parent we see Keiko meeting with is Nog's dad, but there's a freshness to this storyline I find rather charming. After watching Keiko swipe at her husband for the first part of the hour, I assumed her dissatisfaction with the station would be a runner for the rest of the season. But while "A Man Alone" doesn't exactly soften the character, they do give her an outlet for her frustration beyond ruining O'Brien's life one frustrated lecture at a time. Plus, establishing a school is the sort of thing you wouldn't really see on the *Enterprise* (on either *TOS* or *TNG*), and there's something satisfying in the idea of someone trying to create a slice of civilization in the midst of chaos. I hope we see more stories like this, which take the time to show us the nuts and bolts of life on the station.

The love triangle is, unsurprisingly, less successful. The chemistry between Dax and Bashir isn't great, which decreases the will-they/won't-they tension, and Bashir comes across more desperate and

stalker-ish than love- (or lust-) stricken. Dax's bemused interest helps to make sure Bashir doesn't seem too forceful (if she acted uncomfortable or shy around him, he'd be an utter creep), but it also makes sure we don't have any real interest in seeing them hook up. It'd be like watching a babysitter take advantage of a 12-year-old's crush. Conversations between Dax and Sisko, while a bit more interesting, don't have any romantic spark in them either, and Dax's efforts to reassure Sisko that he'll get used to her new body seem to speak to an awkwardness that doesn't really exist. Which isn't to say that Sisko isn't awkward around her; he goes on a laughing jag early in the episode that made me nervous about sharp utensils. But he's awkward around everyone, and the attempt to create drama in their relationship is forced and unearned. The same goes with Bashir's flirting. There's potential drama here—if not, the show would be perfectly fine with just dropping both ideas—but right now, it's forcing both, and neither work.

Finally, the murder plot, which is a bit more exciting than either of the aforementioned stories, but still isn't successful from a plot or a thematic perspective. Ibudan, a black-market dealer during the Cardassian occupation, comes onto the station to do some gaming. Odo doesn't like him, tells him to get lost, and Ibudan apparently winds up dead. Odo becomes the prime suspect, and then some of the Bajorans on the station start going all bigoted and crazy and mob-heavy, forcing Sisko to shoot a phaser into the air like it's a shotgun. (Which is both cool and really silly.) It's okay, though, because Ibudan isn't really dead; he murdered his own clone to frame Odo for the crime to get revenge on the shape-shifter for sending him to jail so many years ago. This is absurd, and the awkward attempts to make Odo's persecution into some sort of grand statement on prejudice are too thin to have much effect. "Past Prologue" was surprisingly complex for its position in the show's run, but "A Man Alone" fits in more neatly with expectations. It's not awful, but it's not good, either, and serves as a pointed reminder of one of the pitfalls early episodes of television series often stumble over: underdeveloped characters behaving in unconvincing ways, and plots that work just a little too hard to mean something.

Stray observations:

- "A Man Alone" also expends a lot of energy trying to remind us that it takes place in Science Fiction Land, what with Dax's holographic brain teaser (it uses brain waves!), Nog's magic bugs, and the whole clone thing. It's okay, guys—I trust those are stars out there.
- Odo has a grouchy speech about women. I wonder how he knows which gender he is?
- Kira isn't as much a focus as she was in "Past Prologue," but her faith in Odo does her a lot of credit.
- I appreciate everyone's efforts to keep up with Spoiler Alert warnings in the comments. As a comparative newbie to the show, they make it easier for me to read your feedback without finding out story details. (And I'm sure they're nice for other people as well.)

Next week: We deal with the traditional "virus makes everybody crazy" episode in "Babel," and O'Brien takes center stage in "Captive Pursuit."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Babel”/“Captive Pursuit”

By [Zack Handlen@zhandlen](mailto:Zack.Handlen@zhandlen)

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“Babel” (season 1, episode 5; originally aired 1/24/1993)

In which Sisko and the others have to blue skies Tuesday on a frying pan...

Ah, the virus-which-incapacitates-nearly-every-major-character episode, a staple of *Trek* since the very first series. It’s a simple enough idea: some form of sickness is brought aboard the ship (or space station), first afflicting only a handful of anonymous crewmembers and one or two leads. The disease, whatever it is, causes some unusual effect, one which is at first comical, but then increasingly less funny when the afflicted can’t knock off the gag. The captain is concerned, the doctor investigates. The stakes slowly rise, as the sickness begins to spread, reducing the ship (or space station) to a skeleton crew. The sick get sicker; lives are at stake; and because this is a ship (or, well, you know), disaster threatens. In our world, if you feel ill at home, you can take a sick day from work, and if your family comes down with the same bug, it’s not like an asteroid is going to strike your house or your warp core is going to breach. It’s not so simple in space. Tensions rise, only a handful of healthy people remain, until finally, in the 11th hour, a cure is discovered. Everyone is cured, and we all learn a helpful lesson about the danger of putting your hand out where someone else may have sneezed.

DS9 follows in the path of *TOS*’ [“The Naked Time”](#) and *TNG*’s [“The Naked Now”](#) with “Babel.” Not only does the episode feature a similar plot structure to the earlier ones, it also takes place at relatively the same point in *DS9*’s first season run that those episodes took place in their respective series. I wouldn’t make much out of this, apart from maybe a sense of tradition. While “The Naked Now” is intended as a direct reference to “The Naked Time,” “Babel” takes a similar premise and heads in a

different direction. In the two “Naked”s (the name of my autobiography, by the way), the virus brings out everyone’s repressed desires and fantasies, resulting in a lot of goofy, overheated melodrama. (On *TOS*, this was par for the course; on *TNG*, where we barely knew any of the characters and most of them were already annoying, it was disastrous.) The “Babel” virus does as the name suggests, and makes anyone who catches it aphasic, and thus incapable of communicating with others. The other episodes sought to use the virus to expose character; *DS9* seeks to occlude it.

It’s not a bad conceit, and the episode, which I admit to dreading a little (I really couldn’t stand “The Naked Now”), is better than I expected. A big reason for this, probably the biggest reason, is that no one in the cast is forced to humiliate themselves. Due to the nature of the virus, the worst anyone suffers is the temporary indignity of speaking nonsense, and that’s far more unsettling than embarrassing. The effect happens multiple times throughout the episode. A character who seems perfectly fine is having a conversation, and then, without any warning or indication they realize something is wrong, that character will say something like, “I have to get the moonlight permanence sideways.” O’Brien is the first struck down, and while “Babel” is told almost entirely from the perspective of the virus-free, it does a decent job of conveying the horror of those initial moments when comprehension abandons the sick, and they struggle to make themselves understood.

Later in the episode, the virus turns fatal, threatening O’Brien’s life and adding a ticking clock to efforts of the people who haven’t taken ill. It’s an understandable turn of the screw, and it doesn’t really hurt the episode, exactly, but I’m not completely convinced it’s necessary. The plot already has an inherent countdown, what with the fact that just about everyone (with the exception of Odo and Quark) eventually catches the virus, so there’s already a clear sense of urgency as the danger closes in. Worse, the lethality element highlights a weakness that might otherwise have gone unaccounted for: No one on the station ever thinks to ask for outside help. Sure, Kira eventually contacts someone on Bajor, but that’s because she believes he helped engineer the virus in the first place, not because she’s appealing to any structured authority. While the show has done a good job establishing geography and social climate of its central location, it hasn’t put more than a cursory effort into setting up just how Deep Space Nine connects to Bajor. Which isn’t to say that Sisko should’ve been able to ring up the home world and get a team of doctors on-board without any worries—more that it would’ve helped to indicate where the station fits in the context of the Federation’s relationship with Bajor, and just how comfortable the Bajoran government is having the outpost floating around its backyard. There are many ways this could’ve been handled without significantly changing the plot, and it speaks to a core issue that I assume will become less relevant over time: I think the writers are still writing the show as though it was set on a spaceship. It’s not the worst crime in the world, but I look forward to them getting more comfortable with the stationary aspect of Deep Space Nine as time goes on.

More problematic is the show’s treatment of Quark, a character I still like who has unfortunately been thrust into the “untrustworthy, and not all that bright, bastard” role. Which isn’t to say there’s something wrong with having an untrustworthy bastard play a regular role on the show, but it can be a tough balance to pull off. Right now, my concern is the way everyone treats Quark. His relationship with Odo makes sense; they’re old adversaries, and there’s a nice runner of mutual respect/contempt

through their conversations that establishes them as, if not precisely equals, than at least comfortably pitted against each other. But everyone else is constantly dismissing or accusing the Ferengi of double-dealing, and, given how much of the cast recently transferred to the station, and how little we've actually seen of Quark's trickery, it starts to come across as bit, well, speciesist. The Ferengi have been problematic ever since their first introduction on *TNG*. While it's standard practice for *Trek* to have different races represent a specific, dominant trait (Klingons are warlike, Vulcans are logical, Romulans are logic-without-morality, etc), generally the show made some effort to treat monocultures with respect. Ferengi, however, have been routinely portrayed as shiftless, greedy nitwits. Armin Shimerman has done great work developing Quark, but there's still a lot of commenting on just how untrustworthy the guy is, and it makes him seem more like a victim of prejudice than a crook. In "Babel," his sneakiness winds up exacerbating the virus problem, when he uses the crew-level replicators to (unknowingly) provide his clientele with virus-laden food, but as Odo himself points out, he could've had access to the replicators if he'd asked. No one even realized they were contaminated.

I'm sure we'll deal more with Quark later in the season, and he does get a chance to be heroic and cool before the end, teaming up with Odo in an effort to save the station from an explosion. And while "Babel" suffers a little from predictability, the parts that work continue to lay the foundation for a long-running series. There's the teamwork aspect. It's not surprising that a station-wide crisis brings everyone together, but it's gratifying to see people accepting their various roles with ease. Poor O'Brien gets somewhat shafted here, as he's the first one to take ill, but before he goes full-River-Tam, the episode shows just how overworked and stressed he is in his new job. Apart from that, we have Sisko taking command with confidence, Kira proving herself willing to go to any ends to achieve her goals, and Bashir being very clever. Nobody reveals any deep, burning secrets (and thankfully, unlike "The Naked Now," there's no android-on-security-chief sex, unless Odo got frisky with a replicator and I blocked it out), but that's probably for the best.

The most unexpected aspect of the episode is the source of the Babel virus. On the previous *Trek* series, there was some vaguely sci-fi explanation for all the mess (if I remember right, "The Naked Now" actually features the same virus we saw in "The Naked Time"). It wasn't really connected to anything, but that was accepted on those shows, because exploration was their main focus. By traveling from planet to planet each week, the writers had a built-in excuse for whatever weird shit they wanted to throw at us. *DS9* isn't so lucky, but I assumed the writers would still try and get away with the same coincidental plotting, at least for a while. So I was pleasantly surprised to find myself wrong in this case. Kira discovers a device attached to one of the command deck replicators, and Bashir quickly determines it caused the virus by creating food with the sickness built in. The device's presence isn't random, either. It was placed on the station years ago by Bajoran dissidents who intended to sabotage the Cardassians. Something went wrong, and the device was only activated following O'Brien's efforts to fix the replicators.

This development doesn't provide us with new information. We knew the Bajoran rebels got up to some crazy stuff during the occupation, and it makes sense that Deep Space Nine was once a prime target. "Babel" uses the connection to develop Kira, showing her a thoroughly capable bad-ass willing

to abduct someone off a planet if she thinks it's necessary. But it doesn't really go any deeper than that. Dr. Surmak, the Bajoran Kira effectively kidnaps, is less a character than a plot device with occasional emotions; first he's outraged, then he's shocked, and then he finds a cure. While there's a definite symbolic resonance to Sisko and the others having to deal with the lingering damage caused by the Cardassians and their legacy, "Babel" is more interested in using the political strife as a convenient scapegoat than it is in delving into the past. But it still works. This isn't an episode that goes for the jugular, and, given the nature of the main threat, the drama is largely impersonal; Odo, Quark, and Kira get to shine, but a decent portion of the hour is given over to standard narratives, like Sisko worrying about his son, or various leads getting frustrated by their inability to speak. Still, it's telling that I'm even willing to look on that as a criticism at this point. "Babel" may use a conveniently available context to justify its story, but that context still has power, and the episode is an able demonstration how the world of *DS9* can recycle old plot ideas in new, and potentially transformative, ways.

Stray observations:

- We still haven't seen a whole lot of Jake (last week's "[A Man Alone](#)" gave him a subplot, but it wasn't really that substantial), but I do like the relationship between him and his father. It's the first parent/child interaction I can think of in the *Trek*-verse that's purely warm and positive.
- Also nice: Jake casually mentions to his dad that he's been hanging out with Nog. I guess Sisko was just fooling when he told Jake to stay away from the other kid?
- Dax enjoys getting ogled. That and her tendency to call Sisko "Benjamin" seem to be her defining character traits so far.

"Captive Pursuit" (season 1, episode 6; originally aired 1/31/1993)

In which we learn O'Brien would totally care if you killed your wife...

Here we have our first purely "Who came out of the wormhole this week?"-style episode, one that largely eschews any serious attempt at world-building in favor a fairly straight-forward story for Chief O'Brien. There are a few twists here, and the episode's resolution is a subtle reminder that we're not exactly in Kansas anymore, but for the most part, "Captive Pursuit" is a lark designed to give Colm Meaney some much-deserved focus. And yet, it has its share of moral complexity. Episodes like this, and "Babel," are somewhat formulaic. It's not so much that we know everything that's going to happen, as it is that we know, by the end, the resolution will be tidy and complete. These are classic stand-alones. There's a clear problem, a lot of struggling, and finally, a solution. The Bajoran doctor discovers a cure for the virus; O'Brien helps his alien buddy escape capture and go about his merry way. In a way, the events of these stories linger in the mind, becoming a part of everything else that happens on Deep Space Nine, but that's true of every show, and unless events of an episode have direct consequences, or are specifically referenced further down the line, they tend to blur together after a while. Technically speaking, all television drama and comedy is serialized, because each

episode is considered canon. It's just that some shows make more of an effort to acknowledge this directly, instead of forcing fans to do the legwork.

I'm getting overly complicated here, so let's focus on the task at hand: In "Captive Pursuit," an alien ship of unknown origin comes through the wormhole, and docks at Deep Space Nine. The ship has been damaged, and Sisko sends O'Brien to check both it and its pilot out, on the theory that O'Brien would make for a warmer welcome than a delegation of Starfleet officers. O'Brien makes first contact with an odd, lizard-like creature who calls himself (or herself) Tosk, and the two gradually bond, even as Tosk refuses to provide information about his background, or what exactly damaged his ship. (He claims it happened in the wormhole, but O'Brien ain't buying it.) Eventually, Odo catches Tosk trying to break into the station's weapons locker, and the alien gets sent to the brig, just as another strange ship arrives. This time, a group pale green humanoids (the leader of whom, played by the great Gerrit Graham, looks a bit like Peter Greene after he dons the titular artifact in *The Mask*) beam directly onto the promenade. They're hunters, and they're looking for Tosk. This is part of a game for them, although "game" doesn't quite cover it; a ritual, maybe, and a point of honor and pride. Tosk is ridiculed for being so easily captured, and Sisko, because of Prime Directive rules and general diplomacy, can't interfere. So O'Brien decides to lend his new friend a hand.

That's about it, really. The episode lives and dies on the chemistry between O'Brien and Tosk (well-played by Scott MacDonald), and the two hit it off quite nicely. O'Brien's innate chumminess, evident even during his *TNG* days, has had a chance to flourish on *DS9*. This is his first focus episode, but even in "Babel," he's a bit frustrated and stressed, but still fundamentally a decent, likeable guy. There's something openly human about O'Brien, something that sets him apart from other *Trek* engineers. On *TOS*, Scotty was all swagger, sexism, and accent—not a bad character, but more an archetype than a human being for most of the show's run, and he didn't become truly likeable until the *Trek* film franchise. (I'd even argue that the character's greatest hour wasn't even on the original show, but during his guest appearance in *TNG*'s "[Relics](#).") Geordi La Forge of *TNG* was less confident, but he was also nerdier, and tended to spend his off-hours striking out with the ladies and playing dress-up with an albino robot. O'Brien is smart, and he knows his stuff, but he mostly comes across as a blue-collar guy just doing his best to get by. His wife is... challenging, and he's got a job which is thankless on the best of days (I imagine "space station" isn't as impressive on a resume as "starship"), but he doesn't complain that much, and he's friendly to everyone. Where other engineers have been the best of the best, O'Brien comes across as the guy who does the hard work while everyone else is showing off. That's a little glib, and it does a disservice to the level of difficulty of the man's job, but that's the basic impression Meaney and the episode give off. Epic things may happen around him, or even to him, but he'll be O'Brien to the core, no matter what.

You need characters like that on a show like this to balance the complexity of the world. Sisko has a tragic past; Kira is dealing with her new role and trying to figure out where her loyalties lie; Odo doesn't know what he is; and Bashir and Dax are, well, sort of just there right now. (For the record, the few times I did watch this show when it aired, Bashir was my favorite, mainly because I found him easiest to identify with. What that says about me, I don't know, but it's not true anymore.) You need

someone like O'Brien hanging around to lighten the mood every once in a while. He's not the comic relief—Quark is the comic relief—but he is a good man without complications. His biggest frustration in this episode is coming up with a way to help Tosk after the hunters arrive. You know he's going to figure something out, because he couldn't live with himself if he didn't, and when he does step up, it's a refreshingly angst-free action sequence. Sure, you could get worked up about O'Brien interfering with the rituals of another culture, and somewhat disobeying his commanding officer in the process, but this is a clear-cut case of "Little guy getting messed with," and there only a handful of morally appropriate responses.

That's probably the episode's biggest flaw: there's no real risk. Tosk was created by the hunters to be hunted, and his life is defined by escape. He seems potentially threatening at first, despite his general adorability, but when the truth comes out, it's impossible not to be on his side, especially considering what a humongous jerk the lead hunter turns out to be. It's fun to see O'Brien step in, just as it's fun when Sisko tells Odo to take his time tracking O'Brien and Tosk down (which leads to maybe the best gag on the show so far, as Odo slooooooowly crosses the room to the elevator), but there's no threat of consequence, and no real danger to any of them. They help out a nice stranger, and get to feel better about themselves, but Tosk remains the hunted, and his world, and culture, remain a mystery. It's telling that we have a crew who are willing to play fast and loose with the rules in order to do what they believe is right. But that loses any dramatic impact when their choice is pain-free.

Still, I don't mean to be too harsh. "Captive Pursuit" is, while not a classic, entertaining enough, and it solidifies O'Brien's moral authority on the station. He's not someone who would never think of himself as the moral authority on anything, and that's crucial to his character. We have an ensemble who, by and large, are convinced they know what's best. And here is a man who's comfortable with machines, but views himself as a soldier, not an officer, working in the trenches while the higher-ups make the big choices. Men like that often end up with more than they bargained for, but it's good to have someone around who, when the lights go out, knows how to find the switch.

Stray observations:

- At the start of the episode, we learn that Quark has been sexually harassing one of his dancers. It's supposed to be funny (I think), but the Ferengi's aggressive sexuality is probably their most unpleasant characteristic.
- "And you're the most natural straight man I've met in ages." That's great, but hasn't he met Data? Although I guess an android wouldn't qualify as "natural."

Next week: Q pays a visit to the station in "Q-Less," and we spend some time getting to know "Dax."

[Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Q-Less”/“Dax”](#)

By [Zack Handlen@zhandlen](mailto:Zack.Handlen@zhandlen)

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[“Q-Less” \(season 1, episode 7; originally aired 2/7/1993\)](#)

In which we get a dash of Q

Q, John de Lancie’s omnipotent prankster god, first appeared in [“Encounter At Farpoint,”](#) the pilot episode of [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#). In that episode, he positioned himself as a terrifying, if somewhat impish, judge of human behavior, forcing the freshly introduced Jean-Luc Picard to defend his species’ right to exist, and setting the basic direction for the series as a whole: exploration, with occasional confusion. Q went on to be a semi-regular on the show, appearing in eight episodes total, some of them middling, and some of them good enough to be included in any all-time *TNG* best list. Q introduced the Borg to the *Trek*-verse; he also guided the series to a close with [“All Good Things...”](#) Whatever the episode, de Lancie was fun to watch, and he and Patrick Stewart played off each other very well. In his loopy way, Q managed to bridge the gap between the original *Trek* and the new series. Here was the ultimate god-like being: basically magical, more than a little campy, but capable of shaking up the status quo in potentially interesting ways.

It’s no surprise that Q shows up on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* in the show’s first season. He’s an iconic figure, he’s easy to transplant, and he offers an easy opportunity to contrast Sisko and the others against the crew of *TNG*. But while de Lancie is in fine form, the character doesn’t really fit in here. Sure, he didn’t exactly fit in on the *Enterprise*, but on that craft, his strangeness was the whole point. Against a crew of consistently well-meaning Boy and Girl Scouts, Q’s cynicism and gags deflated the pomposity, and even reminded us why we liked all these people in the first place. They may be do-

gooding nerds, but they're also smart, resourceful, and sincere, and Q never managed to prove otherwise, no matter how hard he tried. *DS9* is a different matter. The leads here are likeable and distinct, no question, but they're also individuals with their own goals, existing in a world where real evil and pain are an established reality. One of the reasons Q worked on *TNG* is that he seems one of the few beings capable of posing a threat to the expertise and over-achieving brilliance of the *Enterprise*. On Deep Space Nine, we're still supposed to be impressed that the replicators work.

That's probably why Q seems like something of an afterthought in "Q-Less," despite the fact that the episode was almost certainly conceived in an attempt to bring him onto the show. He spars with Sisko, he insults O'Brien, he makes Bashir sleep for a day or so, but the majority of Q's interactions are with the episode's other guest star: Jennifer Hetrick, returning to her role as Vash, Picard's former love interest, and Q's ex-traveling companion. It's an odd pairing. When last we saw Vash ("[Qpid](#)"), she agreed to wander the universe with Q, after a lot of silliness with Sherwood Forest and Picard in tights and so forth. But we've seen Q a few times since then on *TNG*, with no Vash in sight, and, unless I'm misremembering, no one ever asked Q where Vash was. Not even Picard, although I suppose he could be a little resentful at being dumped for a lunatic. Suddenly deciding to remember continuity—for a character with no real reason to need continuity—is odd, and it results in a lot of conversations between Q and Vash which have nothing to do with anyone else on the show. These conversations work okay on their own, and they're not bad if you have some sense of the history between the two characters, but it's too early in the run to spend this much time on people we'll never see again.

Having Q and Vash take up as much screentime as they do means the regular ensemble gets something of a short shrift. In case anyone had any doubts, we learn early in the episode that Dr. Bashir is a bit of a player, spending the cold open putting the moves on an attractive Bajoran woman, and almost immediately hitting on Vash when she arrives at the station. Among other character highlights of the episode, we're reminded that Quark is greedy, and easily manipulated by a woman who knows just how to finger his ears. (I love how that sounds dirty without actually being dirty.) Sisko is grumpy; Dax is calm; Kira is feisty; O'Brien is the Everyman. Oh, and Odo is grumpy, too, but not the same kind of grumpy as Sisko—I'd say Sisko has a sort of "Oh what fresh hell is this" pissiness, while Odo maintains an irritable satisfaction at having his cynicism reaffirmed time and time again.

All of this is well and good, and entirely consistent with what we've seen so far. And there's certainly nothing wrong with consistency; getting to know an ensemble doesn't necessarily require great dramatic shifts or personal revelations. However, so far, *DS9* has done a decent job building its world, even in episodes where world-building wouldn't seem immediately obvious. Even "[Captive Pursuit](#)" gave us a chance to see more of Chief O'Brien, as well as get a sense for Sisko and Odo's willingness to bend the rules when the mood suits them. In "Q-Less," the writers make an effort to distance *DS9* from *TNG* by throwing Q and Sisko into direct confrontation, and showing straight away that Sisko wasn't going to put up with Q's crap in the same way Picard did. (Of course, Picard didn't exactly "put up" with anything. He just didn't punch Q in the face, because Picard wasn't a punching kind of guy.) That's fine, and as obvious as the scene is (Sisko literally says, "I'm not Picard."), it does what it's supposed to.

Only, that scene alone isn't enough to justify the episode, and considering that Q spends most of the hour doing the same tricks he did on the *Enterprise*—popping up unexpectedly, being sarcastic, making people disappear—it's not like Sisko's punch has all that much effect. The station experiences a crisis, but that crisis doesn't have anything to do with Q, although he is the only one on board who understands what's going on. The crew deals with the crisis, much as we've seen them deal with crises before, and while that's fun as far as it goes, it's a little too familiar and rote. This is the sort of action we've seen on every *Trek*, and multiple times as well. Which isn't to say that *DS9* should entirely forego franchise history, or that there's no place on the show for your standard "Let's all be very professional and shout out things we read off of computer screens" sequence. It's just that this in and of itself isn't enough to really drive an episode. Predictable, if professional and basically effective suspense scenes should be the climax to a story that's interesting in and of itself. They can't serve as a reason for the episode to exist.

It's too bad, then, that the closest thing "Q-Less" has to a focus—Vash and her decision to break ties with Q for good—is so under-developed. Hetrick is decent in the role, but the script never gives us much of a chance to get inside her head, and for a person whose made the monumental decision to turn her back on (and potentially risk the wrath of) an incredibly powerful and fickle alien, she's not very well drawn. Even knowing her from her time on *TNG* doesn't help that much. There, she was a standard femme-fatale type, somewhat light on the fatale, created to provide a temporary foil for Picard. Arguably the most interesting thing about her was that Hetrick was somewhat more age-appropriate for Patrick Stewart than a more traditional casting choice would've been.

On *DS9*, Vash behaves largely as you'd expect, flirting with Bashir, easily manipulating Quark into doing her bidding (another reason to like Quark: He doesn't act bitter or cheated when Vash gets the best of him, mainly because he clearly gets off on both the ear fondling and working with a capable, attractive opponent), and telling Q to back off whenever he hovers into view. There's no depth beyond that, though, and no real sense of their relationship, beyond Q's lovely goodbye speech, with which he explains how Vash allowed him to see the universe in a new way. You get the impression that Q abandoned her in the Gamma Quadrant, but you get no real sense if this changed her, or what her intentions are now. The way the episode is arranged, Vash should be the central point from which everything else pivots, but she's vacant, occasionally hinting at depths without ever revealing them. It's her fault that Deep Space Nine is thrown into turmoil; one of the artifacts she brings aboard and attempts to auction off isn't an artifact at all, but a baby life form. Once Sisko and the others figure out the source of the disturbance, the creature is beamed off of the ship, but there's no consequence for Vash, and no sense of whether or not she understood what she was selling, or the danger it represented.

"Q-Less" is lively at times, with some entertainingly snarky work from de Lancie, and a few choice quips, but it's too often a frustratingly perfunctory episode, as though the various components were assembled together in order to fit a generic *Trek* template. It's okay, but mostly serves as a reminder of how important it is for *DS9* to keep to its own identity.

Stray observations:

- It doesn't help matters that the "stealth alien" plot plays like an abandoned script from early in *TNG*'s run, and an example of a fascinating concept reduced to a perfunctory MacGuffin.
- I love how O'Brien eagerly introduces himself to Vash, and acts all contemptuous towards Q—and neither of them really remember him.
- Ha ha, Bashir slept through the danger.
- "Seeing the universe through your eyes, I was able to experience... wonder."

"Dax" (season 1, episode 8; originally aired 2/14/1993)

In which more questions are raised than are answered

After "Q-Less," which fails to effectively incorporate a franchise guest star into a new context, "Dax" is an attempt to refocus attention back onto the show's ensemble. There are new characters, sure, but they exist only to frame a story of Dax and the Trill symbiote, and force Sisko to defend his old friend while determining exactly how comfortable he is with his new one. Traditionally, *Trek* shows have one outsider figure which the series can use to debate various questions about the nature of humanity and is it really all that great to be human and so on. I mentioned in my review of "[Emissary](#)" that Odo is positioned to take the place that Data and Spock held before him, but I may have been jumping the gun. Jadzia Dax, in her way, is just as alien and strange as Odo, and while Odo has basically cornered the market on outsider status, Dax is more difficult to wrap our heads around. Odo changes shape and doesn't know where he comes from, and he has to sleep in a bucket, but he's a single entity, which means his differences from you and I are more physiological than psychological. Dax, on the other hand, is the melding of two personalities, and it's hard to understand exactly what that means.

"Dax" spends a good chunk of its running time trying to answer those questions, and I'm not really sure it succeeds. On the one hand, it's good to finally have some basic ideas about the Trill out in the open. Jadzia worked hard to be a host body for the Dax symbiote, and when the two of them were joined, they created a distinct identity, one in which both sides had some say. Fair enough, but it's still hard to really grasp this on a dramatic level. That could be because of the inherent complexity of the idea, but I'm starting to have bad feelings about Terry Farrell's performance. What I initially took for confidence and detachment (appropriate for a character who had survived, at least in some fashion, for a very long time) is starting to seem like simple blankness. She's not awful, but she's been cast in a demanding role, and there's very little sense that she's capable of projecting the depth that role requires. At the very least, she isn't able to rise above mediocre scripts, although I'm not sure I can blame her there.

The premise of the episode is that Curzon Dax, Dax's former host (and Sisko's "old man") is accused of murdering a beloved general and committing treason on a planet called Klaestron IV. A group of Klaestronians, led by the dead general's son (Gregory Itzin, who you might remember as the evildest of all presidents on [24](#)), secretly board the station and attempt to abduct Dax before anyone realizes

she's gone. Their plans go awry, although not for lack of trying on their part, and Sisko demands an extradition hearing to stall for enough time to figure out what the hell is going on. While "Dax" doesn't really live up to its title, it does do a good job building ties within the rest of the ensemble, and one of the best examples of this is when Sisko and Kira team up to take down Itzin's crusade. While both still have their differences, they're more than willing to work together to protect their own, and Kira's glee in doing so is a pleasure to watch.

The hearing that follows should be familiar to *Trek* fans, as we've been down this road before. Dax's not-a-trial trial is probably most reminiscent of the semi-classic *TNG* episode "[The Measure Of A Man](#)," in which Picard defended Data's right to exist against an over-eager scientist. That episode, airing in the show's second season, was one of the first clear signs that *TNG* was going to find its way out of the dregs of its earlier outings. "Dax" is nowhere near as good, because the focus of the episode is nowhere near as interesting as Data. It's a shame, but in an episode which supposedly gets into the history of one of *DS9*'s least-explored characters, Dax remains largely on the sidelines. She's unwilling to explain the situation when Sisko questions her, and she's largely silent during the hearing, and while this silence is explicable in terms of character, it essentially removes her from the drama. Dax's biggest problem up until this point is that she hasn't really done much of anything, beyond call Sisko "Benjamin" and dodge Bashir's advances. Everyone else on the station has goals and a distinct personality, but Dax remains calm, aloof, and far too easy to forget.

"Dax" does little to change this, and the issue is compounded by the fact that the seemingly impossible philosophical question that drives the episode—what separates Jadzia Dax from Curzon Dax—is ultimately irrelevant to Dax's fate. In "The Measure Of A Man," Data's nature, and his rights as a sentient being, were the crux of the trial, and there was no last minute reversal or reveal to distract from the issue. The episode had a definite point of view, and it worked hard to convince us of that point of view. This sort of inquiry is largely missing from "Dax," even though the episode seems to have all the surface indications. Sisko, with an assist from Bashir and Kira, spends the hearing trying to prove that Jadzia is a distinct entity from Curzon, and cannot be held accountable for Curzon's crimes. That's not a bad issue to raise, except it really doesn't matter at all. Sisko really only plays up the idea because he's trying to buy time for Odo's inquiries, and he wants to prevent the Klaestronians from taking Dax away. Worse still, since Curzon was completely innocent of both the murder and the treason, the relationship between the dead man and the young woman has nothing to do with anything. There are hints of Sisko trying to come to terms with how he views Dax, and there's a nice conversation at the end between Dax and the general's widow, but none of this adds up to much.

So we know a bit more about Dax than we did, but not enough to really make the character work. Thankfully, the rest of the ensemble fares somewhat better. As mentioned, having Sisko and Kira team up works very well, and it's good to see Bashir getting to do something beyond hitting on ladies and acting like a dork. Sisko sends Odo off to do some investigating on Klaestron IV, and the idea of the station's constable jaunting about solving mysteries is very satisfying. Initially, I was impressed at how well *DS9* managed to avoid the pitfalls *TNG* suffered through in its first season, but while I'm still having far, far more fun than I did when writing about, say, "[Justice](#)," I'm starting to notice some

persistent flaws. This is competent television, but it could, and should, be more than that. I look forward to watching new episodes each week because I enjoy spending time with the characters, and because I enjoy the suspense of waiting for a show to finally hit its stride. After watching “Dax,” I realize I have a bit longer to wait. There’s too much easy writing going on here, with neat plots and predictable resolutions. Thankfully, Sisko and the others are ragged enough around the edges that sooner or later, things are bound to get more complicated.

Stray observations:

- The hearing judge was played by Anne Haney, who always seemed to get these types of roles. Also, the general’s widow was none other than Fionnula Flanagan. Haney was in the great *TNG* episode [“The Survivors,”](#) and Ms. Flanagan appeared in *TNG* and *Star Trek: Enterprise*, although she’s most familiar these days from her work as Eloise Hawking on [Lost](#).
- I really, really love Major Kira. Nana Visitor’s line reading of “But also... annoys us,” was probably my favorite moment in the episode.
- While it’s great that Bashir caught the Dax-kidnapping and was able to warn Sisko, the setup makes him look like a jerk. He offers to escort Dax to her quarters, and she politely declines; he then decides that her politeness allowed him an open window to go against her wishes, and runs after her. That’s not cute, it’s creepy.

Next week: Bashir has some trouble letting go of “The Passenger,” and Quark keeps playing games in “Move Along Home.”

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Passenger”/“Move Along Home”

By [Zack Handlen@zhandlen](mailto:Zack.Handlen@zhandlen)

Feb 16, 2012 10:00 AM

"The Passenger" (season 1, episode 9; originally aired 2/22/1993)

In which Bashir is touched by a stranger and goes a little mad...

Our theme this week: Aliens be crazy. Today's double feature represents a new low, as *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* engages in that classic of all *Trek* pastimes, hanging around with another species which has magic powers or some damn thing. This story type allows for a lot of freedom and inspired creativity; it also allows for some deeply goofy ideas, ideas that wouldn't ever fly with established characters. Both of these episodes run to the goofy side, and neither are all that good. "The Passenger" goes for a sort of crime-horror story, "Move Along Home" just embraces the weirdness as much as it can, and neither is memorable for the right reasons. "The Passenger" is especially generic, a mystery which relies on poor communication between all parties and a one-dimensional villain, along with a lame, unsurprising twist. There are a few bright spots of character interaction, but the central storyline is a space filler (no pun intended), the sort of hook that probably sounded fun in a pitch meeting—"The bad guy takes over Bashir's brain!"—but plays out about as clumsily as you'd expect.

The very first scene of the episode sets the mood: Kira and Bashir are returning to the station, and Kira congratulates Bashir on saving a life. Instead of taking the compliment gracefully, Bashir goes off on how brilliant he is, in a short speech which I think is supposed to be comedic, but comes off as irritating. Up until this point, Bashir has largely been defined by a certain naïveté, along with his general horniness and medical expertise; He's like some over-eager med student, so determined to make the most of his new job that he doesn't see the dangers until they smack him in the face. A

certain amount of good-natured arrogance fits well with the characterization, and it wouldn't take much effort to imagine Julian as the favored son from a wealthy family, on his own for the first time. But even in that context, the cold open doesn't work. It's too much, and the writer's need to really nail the laugh makes the speech less about Bashir, and more about how silly it would be for someone to be so full of themselves. Alexander Siddig does what he can with it, playing up Bashir's complete cluelessness that what he's saying could be considered at all offensive or rude (he's just stating the facts!), but it's still cringe-inducing, and worse, it's cringe-inducing in a distracting, underlined sort of way.

Then the whole "criminal genius who also happens to be able to body jump" plot arrives, and what was wince-inducing becomes flat and predictable. About the episode's only surprise is that Bashir is the one who gets infected, and not Kajada, the cop escorting Vantika who's obsessed with the idea that her prisoner might still be alive. I say "surprise" only in the loosest sense. Anyone paying attention would've realized the truth almost immediately, since

1. the episode loudly telegraphs that Kajada may be possessed, which makes for an obvious feint,
2. when "Vantika" grabs Quark from behind in the Promenade, he has a male voice, and he's shorter than Kajada, and
3. Vantika actually takes hold of Bashir's neck and intones "Make... me... live" during the cold open.

Bashir doesn't undergo an immediate personality change or start abusing his genitals with a crucifix, but there really isn't much mystery here.

I'll give the episode some credit for not overplaying the reveal as much as it might have, but it's still pretty clunky, and nowhere near as creepy or cool as it needed to be to support an entire hour. Vantika is by necessity a personality-free bad guy, more of an idea than a conscious threat, one who spends the first half of "The Passenger" as an absentee boogeyman, and the rest as a speech impediment. There are potentially intriguing ideas here about immortality and hubris and crazy science, but those ideas don't amount to much. In theory, the fact that we spend so much time hearing how terrifying and brilliant Vantika is should make his eventual "arrival" all the more powerful. In practice, though, it just makes Siddig's attempts to convey menace by... speaking... slowly... seem all the more foolish. Also foolish? The name "Vantika," which is not a word that you want to repeat too many times. It sounds like the name of a failed line of high-tech ladies fashion accessories. And "Kajada" ain't much better as a name *or* a character, She's a grim, inarticulate piece of wood who could've saved everyone a lot of trouble by just sharing what Vantika had been researching at the outset, instead of wandering around like the housekeeper in a haunted house. Yes, yes, everyone's doomed, we get it, now maybe you could start in with the specifics.

In terms of the episode's world-building elements, Quark gets involved with some actual illegitimate shenanigans this week, hiring a crew on Vantika's orders to hijack a shipment of life-extending deuridium. (The Kobliad are a dying race, and require deuridium to survive. Which, by the way,

would've made for a better story focus, but I digress.) It seems like the show has finally decided to give us hard proof of Quark's nefarious ways, and this creates an odd balance for the character. On the one hand, it's interesting to have a series regular who, every now and again, breaks the rules for his own benefit. On the other hand, Quark is flat out teamed up with a psychotic serial killer, and while the Ferengi isn't directly involved with any murdering, he's still a big part of the villain's plan. I'm not sure that's a level of moral dubiousness this show can really sustain. Quark as gray-area opportunist is fine; Quark as flunky who helps killers go on killing is something else entirely. If *DS9* wants to go the latter route, it's going to be hard to justify the character's continued presence on the show without some serious moral accounting.

There's also the arrival of George Primmin, a Starfleet-sanctioned security officer who arrives on the station to help safe-guard the deuridiiium shipment and then just hangs out for a bit. His first act is to question Odo's behavior, which puts the shape-shifter on the defensive side. As setups go, this one makes sense, and hits on something I hope we'll see more of in the future: the Federation's efforts to integrate Deep Space Nine into its system. Sure, Bajor isn't an official member yet, but Sisko is in command of the station, and it makes sense that Starfleet would send more of its officers on board, both to assist Sisko, and to establish a base of bureaucracy that large organizations like the Federation tend to love. Out of everything in "The Passenger," this small subplot is the most successful element, in that it gives us a problem that tells us about the people involved, and finds an answer in a satisfying, character-appropriate way. Primmin causes some stress, so Sisko orders him to pay attention to Odo; Odo is paranoid (justifiably so, really) that Primmin is there to take his job, so Sisko tells him to calm down, and assures him he's still in charge. Then Primmin sees the error of his ways, and, picking up on Odo's behavior, actually manages to spot a potentially massive security problem before it happens.

This is a not bad example of how predictable storylines don't necessarily mean bad storylines. While Bashir-as-Vantika plays out with all the usual sci-fi babble, resolving itself not through character but through a last minute, "Press some buttons!"-style fix, Primmin and Odo get through their initial hostility in a way that makes sense, and says some good things about both men. We learn Primmin, though a bit of a stuffed shirt, can take orders and, what's better, doesn't ignore his mistakes. We also learn that Odo, while suspicious in nature, is more than willing to accept when he's wrong and find common ground. In a largely drab outing, it's nice that we can still find small exchanges like this one.

Stray observations:

- I didn't do a lot of summary in this writeup, mainly because the plot didn't seem worth repeating. But: Vantika body jumps into Bashir, Kajada gets knocked out while trying to spy on Quark (and we get one of those hilarious scenes where a nearly comatose person manages to get out just a few words before collapsing, and those words aren't of any use to anyone), Vantika-Bashir try and steal the ship with the deuridiiium shipment, Sisko and the others throw up a tractor beam just in time, and Dax manages to block out Vantika's brain waves long enough for Bashir to take control.

- While talking with Dax about Vantika’s potential brain-jumping plans, Bashir throws out the old saw about how humans only use a small percentage of their brains. [This isn’t true.](#)
- Siddig’s performance as Vantika-Bashir is bizarre. I give him points for fully committing to an idea that could look ridiculous, but that doesn’t mean he looks any less ridiculous.

"Move Along Home" (season 1, episode 10; originally aired 3/14/1993)

In which we play a game, and everything is kind of stupid...

I have a soft spot for goofy *Trek*. Maybe it’s because I started this project with the original show, where it seemed like every other week I dealt with babe-robots who destruct with a kiss, totalitarian computers, and Abraham Lincoln (who, thank god, was not fighting vampires at the time). Few of these episodes were good in the traditional sense, but most of them were fun, and good-natured, and that goes a long way. So while I don’t think “Move Along Home” in any way qualifies as a quality episode of *DS9*, and while it once again sacrifices ensemble interaction in favor of an outside force, I didn’t hate it. It was utterly ridiculous, and most of the times I was laughing, I was laughing at the episode rather than with it, but when you’re dealing with mediocre TV, you take whatever laughter you can get.

Things start promisingly enough. Sisko is getting suited up in his fancy dress uniform, when Jake bounds in the room—remember Jake? Sisko’s son? Yeah, it’s been a while. Anyway, Sisko sets things up for Jake: A new race of aliens is coming about the station, and Sisko and his team are in charge of handling first contact. When the aliens arrive, things don’t go quite as expected. For one, Bashir has lost his dress uniform, which is an odd beat that’s neither funny, nor character-illuminating, nor, unless I missed something, at all relevant to the plot. For another, the aliens, who call themselves the Wadi, aren’t much interested in Sisko or any of the others. They want to go to Quark’s bar, because they hear he has games, so that’s where they go.

We’ve dealt with first contact before in the *Trek*-verse. Hell, there’s even a *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode called [“First Contact”](#) (not to mention [the movie](#), which, admittedly, isn’t really about first contact). “Move Along Home” isn’t really about Sisko trying to negotiate a relationship with the Wadi, mainly because the Wadi are basically nutters who exist only so we can have a 30-minute psuedo-holodeck segment. Most of the time, *Trek* makes an effort to create coherent societies for their aliens. Those societies aren’t always perfect, but they at least feel like they have a purpose beyond providing temporary narrative conflict. Then you have folks like the Wadi, who have one trait—they love games!—and, after a single episode, disappear forever. While “The Passenger” is dull stuff, at least the Kobliad seem they could exist outside the episode. The Wadi are like cartoon characters briefly granted the gift of flesh. They arrive, they spout some silly crap, they stress everybody out, and then they leave, without really changing much of anything.

The Wadi’s main gift is their love of the game Chula. They force Quark to play after they catch him trying to cheat them into a loss on the Dabo tables. What Quark doesn’t realize is that the four game

pieces he's moving around a giant plastic board represent Sisko, Bashir, Dax, and Kira, who have all been magicked from their rooms in the middle of the night and stuck into a game space with no clear connection to the outside world. As Quark tries to make the most of an unfamiliar challenge, Sisko and the others must make their way through several levels of Chula—called “Shaps”—solving the trap that awaits them on each level.

Sounds ridiculous, right? It's even more ridiculous in practice, because throughout the game, Falow, the head of the Wadi delegation, keeps popping in to taunt Sisko and the others with the refrain, “Move along home.” It's sort of spooky, but mostly stupid, which is the whole episode in a nutshell. There's considerable time spent on worrying whether or not the four station crewmembers trapped in the game will find their way out, or if Quark will somehow manage to beat the system, but the suspense is never particularly suspenseful. For all their weirdness, the Wadi don't seem evil or cruel enough to actually murder anyone, and they clearly understand the language and customs of other humanoid races enough for us to assume they won't let Sisko die without realizing the action would have consequences.

Of course, that raises its own questions. Like, if the Wadi know enough about the station to know Quark has the gaming tables, shouldn't they realize that there's no real precedent in the area for a game like Chula? Throughout the episode, Sisko stresses over the need to effectively manage first contact, but arguably, the Wadi should be as interested in making sure the talks go well. Maybe even more so, given that they're obsessed with games (again, this is the only thing we know about them). The Federation spans enough systems to potentially provide access to thousands of new games, and millions of potential participants. Yet the Wadi seem barely interested in anything beyond their immediate pleasure. They “win” in the end, embarrassing Quark and reassuring everyone that there was no real danger in a mild case of kidnapping, but unless they have some resources that Starfleet wants, I can't imagine anyone picking up the phone and calling them again any time soon.

As for the adventures in Shap-jumping, well, if you ever wanted to see Avery Brooks playing hopscotch, here's your chance. Like I said, this sort of silliness isn't all bad, and the basic weirdness of the game in which Sisko and the others are trapped at least keeps the episode from being completely boring. But it's all very Saturday-morning cartoonish. Given the setup, there's no real other way for it to be. In one Shap (ugh), Dax and Bashir figure out they need to play a child's game to continue; in another Shap (gah), Bashir realizes they need to drink from champagne flutes to stop themselves from being gassed. Then Quark rolls a die wrong, and Bashir gets eaten by some green light. About the only time Chula gets even close to legitimate drama is when we learn that one of the remaining players will have to be sacrificed for the other two to survive. Because Sisko refuses to leave Dax behind, everybody ends up “dying.” But since nobody really dies, and since Sisko had no way of knowing that keeping Dax alive would get them all “killed,” it's essentially pointless.

Beyond the silliness, there are a couple not-terrible scenes. When Jake realizes his father is missing, he immediately goes to Odo, and I like the relationship between the boy and the constable; Odo is gruff, but he treats the boy's concerns with respect. Quark also gets a nice moment when he realizes the

bits of plastic he's been treating as game pieces represent people with whom he works. When he hears he has to sacrifice one to save the others, he begs and pleads for the choice to be taken out of his hands. This isn't the height of heroism, but it at least shows that Quark isn't completely heartless.

That's about it, really. In retrospect, there's precious little to defend in this episode. It's more memorable than "The Passenger," and I had an easier time staying awake watching it, but that's mostly because it's hard to sleep when you keep saying, "The hell?" at your TV screen. Out of everything I've seen of *DS9* so far, "Move Along Home" would fit the easiest into the first season of *TNG*. That is in no way a compliment.

Stray observations:

- Jake has apparently started to learn about girls from Nog. It's weird that Ferengi are into human, and very nearly human, women, right? It's hard to imagine the reverse happening, although I suppose it's possible. And it's not like there are a ton of Ferengi ladies around for Nog to leer at.
- This marks the second, and last, appearance of Primmin. Goodbye, sir! You will be quickly forgotten.
- Anyone who says to "learn as you play" is getting ready to basically cheat the hell out of you.
- After enjoying Kira last week (and generally digging her in "The Passenger"), she's really shrill here. Hard to blame her, really.
- "Dad, I'm 14." "I'm glad we agree on something. Go to bed."

Next week: We spend some time getting to know the Ferengi in "The Nagus," and Odo is tempted by the "Vortex."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Nagus”/“Vortex”

By [Zack Handlen@zhandlen](mailto:Zack.Handlen@zhandlen)

Feb 23, 2012 10:00 AM

“The Nagus” (season 1, episode 11; originally aired 3/21/1993)

In which Quark gets an offer he can’t refuse, but probably should have anyway...

The Ferengi are basically awful. There’s no real way to get around this; the entire race is essentially a horrible cultural stereotype repurposed as literally alien, and therefore supposedly rendered inoffensive. I doubt, or at least hope, that this wasn’t done on purpose, unless it’s part of some grand scheme to humanize racial caricatures and thus bring all of us closer together through prosthetics and hammy acting—in which case, bravo. But I don’t think that’s the case, much as I don’t think anyone sat down to create the Ferengi and said to themselves, “Oh man, now I finally have a socially acceptable place to funnel all the horrible things I think about that family who lives down the block, you know the one I mean.” Fiction writing is an act of creation, and in that act of creation, writers use everything they can, especially when inventing fantasy environments. So, every once in a while, you get somebody who maybe isn’t the most imaginative person in the world, and they need to come up with an entirely new creature, and that’s how you wind up with Jar Jar Binks or the frog-like Trade Federation stooges who speak in thick “Oriental” accents. (Sorry, I’ve been re-watching the *Star Wars* prequels lately.)

Back on point, however the Ferengi were originally conceived, they remain one of the low points of the *TNG*-era *Trek*-verse, a lot of bad jokes and sniveling tied up under the guise of culture. Even if you put aside the social issues this raises, this presents concerns from a story perspective. There’s no inherent depth in a stereotype. That’s why it’s a stereotype; It’s an idea created to allow one group to

make assumptions about another group, and use those assumptions to dismiss that other group's autonomy. (This is a huge oversimplification, but bear with me.) So when a writer decides to use a race like the Vulcans or the Klingons, it becomes necessary to try and expand the stereotype into something more complex, while still maintaining a basic consistency with the race as originally presented. With the Vulcans and the Klingons, and most other *Trek* races, that's not too hard. Stoicism has enough of a historical precedent to be a believable philosophical foundation, and it's not like the Earth is hurting for warrior cultures.

The Ferengi, though, are greedy, cowardly cheats. That's really all they have (that and the ears), and when it comes time to make something more out of it, well, it's pretty hard to find the dignity in a group whose main goals in life are cheating everyone else out of a good deal and getting their ears rubbed. "The Nagus" does what it can with such a limited platform. The Rules of Acquisition, a series of guidelines which drive the Ferengi's monetarily fixated culture, aren't a terrible idea, because they at least attempt to make avarice into a value. Having Wallace Shawn play the apparent leader of the Ferengi, Grand Nagus Zek, is another smart move, because Wallace Shawn is great, and he manages to give the role a certain charm. There's a clever story here, about the limits of power and how it's better to be a medium-sized fish in a small pool than a big fish in a big pool. And as always, Armin Shimerman keeps finding ways to ground Quark, and make his morally questionable choices into something more complex than simple self-interest. Without Shimerman, this would've been intolerable. With him, it's surprisingly not bad.

It's still not good, though. The plot: The Grand Nagus arrives on Deep Space Nine, determined to make the most for his people out of the business opportunities created by the wormhole. He brings together a number of powerful Ferengi for a conference on how best to take advantage of the Gamma Quadrant—a place which has never heard of Ferengi before, and has no idea that they might not always be the most trustworthy. At the end of the meeting, Zek announces that he's retiring, passes the title onto Quark, and, more or less promptly, dies. Initially overjoyed about the unexpected promotion, Quark soon realizes he's not cut out for a life of double-dealing and backstabbing, especially not when the backstabbers have actual knives. Zek's son Krax and Quark's brother Rom team up to take Quark out, but just when they think they have the drop on him (having trapped poor Quark in an airlock chamber), Odo shows up with Zek, who isn't dead. The true Nagus was hibernating and testing to see if his son was ready for leadership. Krax failed the test, Zek takes back his staff and robe, and everything goes back to normal.

I'm a sucker for political maneuvering, and the few times "The Nagus" deals in back-room deals and handshake negotiations, it's a decent amount of fun. The idea that Quark would be in over his head so quickly makes sense, and fits in with what we've learned about the character; He's clever, but clever only goes so far. While the episode doesn't take the Ferengi's culture all that seriously, it does put more effort into giving them rituals and goals than most any other Ferengi episode we've seen in the past (in those, the Ferengi were almost always the obstacle for the main characters to circumvent), to the point where it's possible to believe them functioning as a culture, and not just as a group of not-all-that-threatening villains. It's just that, for an hour that's supposedly driven by Quark's attempts first

to please the Nagus and then simply to survive, our protagonist is curiously passive. He sucks up to Zek, he lords his power over his brother, and then, when the crisis arrives and he faces really danger, he refuses help from Sisko, Odo, and anyone else. The only reason he survives the episode is Odo's dogged determination to get to the truth. Which isn't a bad character moment, and it's also a nice detail in their friendship, but it leaves Quark on the outside looking in.

That would be fine if Quark wasn't already a somewhat problematic character. The show has given him a few chances to define himself before, but "The Nagus" should've been a chance for us to understand what drives Quark, or least give him something more interesting to do than toady up to his customers, trade barbs with Odo, and yell at his brother. It didn't need to be great drama, but texture would've been nice. Instead, he goes through the basic one-two-three routine of the comic-relief stooge. There's no arc for him, just a bouncing from place to place. At first, I took this as an interesting characterization; Quark isn't a genius, and he's better off just running the bar. But it's not that he's not a genius (although he isn't). It's that the Ferengi aren't to be taken seriously. This whole episode is a joke, and even when life or death stakes are involved, there's no reason to care. When *TNG* poked holes into Klingon culture, it meant something. With the Ferengi, it's like the entire concept is so ridiculous, the writers have a hard time even caring enough to poke.

The most successful part of "The Nagus" has little to do with the title character, or Quark. Jake is still hanging out with Nog, but the two boys run into a problem when Nog's father, Rom, demands Nog quit school at the behest of Zek. This causes some friction in their friendship, but Jake decides the best thing to do would be to keep teaching Nog what he learns in school. It's a sweet, good-natured twist on a storyline that, at least for a while, seemed to be heading towards a more angst-ridden resolution. Sisko is frustrated that his son doesn't want to hang out as much as he used to, and he's also hearing from Chief O'Brien (who has taken over the school in his wife's absence) that Nog isn't a great influence on the boy. Instead of lecturing Jake on who he hangs out with, Sisko makes an effort (on Dax's advice) to, well, spy on his son, and finds out about the lessons Jake has been giving Nog. So he finds out Jake is a good kid, and that Nog isn't too bad himself. It's a simple story, and effectively finds the best out of two characters we've been given reason to doubt. It's too bad Quark couldn't have been allowed the same narrative indulgence

Stray observations:

- If Zek is still alive, does that mean the Ferengi who sold his vacuum desiccated remains was in on the joke?
- How the hell does O'Brien have time to teach school?
- We've seen Morn before, but I believe this is the first time we've actually seen a main character talking to him.
- The riff on the opening scene of *The Godfather*, with Quark petting some kind of lizard-bladder thing, was unexpected, and funny.
- UPDATE: I originally suggested that the Ferengi were a riff on bigoted concepts of Judaism. Others have pointed out in the comments that I maybe should've done a bit more research

before painting with a broad brush. I still stand by my argument of the first two paragraphs; The Ferengi too easily fit into the "ethnic comic relief" stereotypes for me to be entirely comfortable with them, and if they're intended as satire, well, the joke never gets beyond "HA HA LAME." So, basically, they suck, wherever they came from.

“Vortex” (season 1, episode 12; originally aired 4/18/1993)

In which Odo finds he can't go home again—at least, not yet...

If “The Nagus” tries and fails to give us an idea of Quark’s social life, “Vortex” makes a similar attempt to get into the head of Odo, to greater success. While “Vortex” hints at deeper mysteries and a more complex mythology than the fairly simplistic greedy bastards set up in the previous episode, it’s just as traditional, both in what it accomplishes for the character, and the basic design of the story. To put it another way, “Vortex” is a “hint” episode, offering clues to backstory, but still too early in the series’ run for there to be any real chance that those clue will lead us someplace solid. As such, it’s more interesting for what it says about Odo than it is for anything it says about where Odo came from.

“Vortex” also continues what’s turning into something of a running gag for the series: the difficulties in establishing positive relationships with new races. It makes sense that the wormhole would lead to multiple instances of first contact, and it’s to the show’s credit that this hasn’t always gone smoothly. In fact, I’d say the only time it has gone smoothly was with the Wadi in [“Move Along Home,”](#) and even then, the results were confusing, and ambiguous. Sisko’s brief encounter with the Rakhar goes significantly worse. He has a prisoner from their world who needs to be tried for murder and theft, but the Rakhar government—or at least the only guy willing to talk with Sisko—isn’t having it. He wants the prisoner back, he wants him back yesterday, and he just basically hates having to deal with, well, anything, really. So far as I can tell, this is the first official contact between Rakhar and the Federation, but the way this dude acts, Sisko is a telemarketer who interrupted him in the middle of a good lay.

As far as station politics go, though, “Vortex” isn’t about Sisko trying to negotiate the right way to return the Rakharian “criminal” Croden (Cliff De Young, who will always be the dad in [Flight Of The Navigator](#) to me) to his people. It’s about Odo deciding just how far he’s willing to go to find out about his past, and just how much he’ll compromise the law in order to protect a good man. The constable notices Croden early in—the guy is an unfamiliar face at Quark’s, which isn’t that unusual, but his nervousness and unwillingness to meet Odo’s gaze puts the shapeshifter on the defensive. While it would be easy to assume anyone would be a little uncomfortable to find Odo giving them the eye, Croden is, indeed, up to something. When Quark goes to a back room to make a deal on a trinket with a pair of Mirdaron, Croden busts up the meeting and tries to steal the trinket. Things go badly, and they get worse when Odo reveals he’s been watching them the whole time, disguised as a drinking glass. There’s a fight, one of the Miradorn is killed, and Croden winds up in the brig. Life as usual on the *DS9*, until Croden drops the bomb that Odo’s ability to transmogrify wasn’t new to him.

He claims he's seen shapeshifters before, and has, in fact, been to one of their colonies. He calls them Changelings, and has a nifty locket with a bit of Changeling material inside.

It's hard to get too excited about any of this. De Young is a decent actor, and if he occasionally relies too much on tics and intensity for my taste, he's fine here (although he looks weirdly dirty in the make-up). But that doesn't change the fact that anyone who's ever watched a genre show already knows where this is going. Croden is lying, and the only question is how much he's lying, and even that isn't much of a question. When you're trying to tease out a backstory, you want to tease the audience by offering them more information than you're actually planning on giving them, while at the same time providing just enough to make sure nobody feels like they've been completely cheated. Usually this means some tidbit that pushes us incrementally closer to the main goal. By the end of "Vortex," we find out that Croden has never actually been to a Changeling colony, and that he picked up the trinket from a salesman. But people really did tell stories about Changelings once upon a time on Rakhar, and the trinket really does seem to be connected to Odo's people. It's something, although whether or not it's enough to justify our time is open to debate.

I'm not sure it's a great idea to think of episodes of television in brutally transactional terms—I don't need a certain amount of information provided to me in order for me to feel like I've been fairly dealt with. Still, given how much of the story is spent with Odo wondering if he should trust Croden, and Croden offering him (and, by extension, us) more answers than he could possibly imagine, it's hard not to be let down by how little we get here. So we look to the rest of the episode for sustenance, and there's some decent bits to chew on, thankfully. As mentioned, Sisko's interactions with Rakhar fit in well with what we've seen of the tedious reality of interstellar communication so far. The Miradorns make for decent villains. They're a "twinned" race (so I guess they come from the Territories?), and when Ah-Kel loses his partner, he loses more than just a brother; he loses, as he explains to Sisko, his entire reason for being. So he's really, really intent on getting revenge, which leads to a [*Wrath Of Khan*](#)-esque fight in the vortex that gives this episode its name. Ah-Kel isn't the most clearly defined character in the history of the show, but he at least has a reason for what he does that goes beyond "EVIL."

As with "The Nagus," it's the small moments of decency that really carry the episode. Croden is lying about what he knows, but he's at least lying for a reason. Rakhar is, from what we can tell, an awful place, and Croden lost nearly all of his family when he disobeyed the government. He has one daughter left, but he's hidden her in stasis on an asteroid in the Chamra Vortex. The reason he lies to Odo is so he can get back to his daughter and free her from the stasis box; Most likely, he tried to rob the Miradorn earlier in order to buy a ship, but it doesn't seem like he's that good at thievery. (Dude is waaaay too chatty, for one thing.) Once Odo realizes what's up, he's understandably let down by not getting the answers he wanted, but he's forced to make a moral choice: Does he take Croden back to his homeworld, where he will be executed? Or does he allow the man and his child to go free? Curiously, up until the end, Odo doesn't have a lot of autonomy in "Vortex." While he's tempted by Croden's offer, that temptation would never be enough to inspire him to break the law. That's not how

Odo works, but while it's great that the episode makes an effort to stay true to the character, it leads to him being grumpily sidelined right up until the final scenes.

In the end, Odo figures out how to escape Ah-Kel (killing the Miradorn in the process, leaving a convenient, although completely necessary, absence of witnesses), and he decides to let both Croden and Yareth (the daughter) go. This decision is made easier by Croden's willingness to sacrifice himself to save both his child's and Odo's lives. (This is particularly effective seeing as Odo was trying to take away Croden's freedom for good.) That's pretty high up on the Decency Scorecard, so it's not a shock when Odo, still grouchy, allows Croden to accompany Yareth onto a Vulcan science ship. "Vortex" is, like a great many of episodes we've seen so far this season—staunchly mediocre—but its good moments help elevate it from the completely forgettable, and they also serve as a promise that these characters, and this world, are worth exploring.

Stray observations:

- At one point, Ah-Kel browbeats Quark into giving up that Croden has left with Odo. Quark's very real concern that his actions might get Odo killed are more positive character development than anything we saw in "The Nagus."
- Last week marked (I think) the first official recognition of Morn. This week, we get the first, "Morn won't stop talking!" joke.
- So Odo can transform himself into anything, regardless of mass. At least, he can transform himself into anything smaller than himself. I wonder if he could do something bigger?

Next week: "Battle Lines" are drawn, and we sit down to listen to "The Storyteller."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Battle Lines”/“The Storyteller”

By [Zack Handlen@zhandlen](mailto:ZackHandlen@zhandlen)

Mar 1, 2012 10:00 AM

“Battle Lines” (season 1, episode 13; originally aired 4/25/1993)

In which Mike Ehrmantraut finally meets someone he can't kill...

This week Kira gets an episode, and it is, unsurprisingly, a fairly heavy one. Kai Opaka, the spiritual leader of the Bajorans, returns, and just as quickly dies; we learn the evils of constant conflict; and Sisko gets a bit pissy with poor Bashir. “Battle Lines” isn’t entirely centered on Kira, but her character does provide most of the episode’s emotional weight, at least as far as the ensemble is concerned. There are also a group of *Road Warrior* rejects trapped in what has to be the most hellish interpretation of Lazer Tag I’ve ever seen, and they serve as the episode’s cautionary tale. In many ways, this is a classic sort of *Trek* story, using a never heard of before, probably never heard of again alien society to serve as a metaphor for very real human problems. The Ennis and the Nol aren’t defined beyond their perpetual struggle (and their fashion sense), and as much as it’s possible to pity them, we’ve no sense of them as existing beyond their situation. Which, of course, may be the point; if you’re trying to show the ways unbending enmity can transform and reduce a culture, you’re not going to give that culture a thriving arts scene. But that still makes for an hour filled with a lot of bland angry people, one that keeps hinting at more interesting directions, but never having the courage to follow them.

What’s both frustrating and promising about “Battle Lines” is that the pieces are here for something legitimately terrific. Kira’s past association with Bajoran terrorists, her life spent waging war on the Cardassians, and the hope and uncertainty which peace brings, are all meaty, legitimately compelling

subjects, and all of them are brought up in this episode to varying degrees. In the cold open, O'Brien shows Sisko some Cardassian files he discovered on the station; Kira looks at them, and is furious to learn that the Cardassians considered her a "minor operative." This is played as a joke, and not a particularly funny one, but it makes sense. Major Kira is still struggling for ways to define herself, and she's so unsure that she's willing to turn to her most hated enemies for help. When Kai Opaka arrives on the station, Kira is in awe. When the Kai dies, she's distraught, with a naked display of grief that borders on the absurd. Kira has an arc in this episode, to an extent; she's frustrated and angry until the resurrected Kai forces her to express her sorrow. But "Battle Lines" is so invested in making sure we understand just how screwed the Ennis and Nol are that poor Kira doesn't get her due.

Nor does the Kai. While I wasn't entirely sold on the role of the Prophets in the pilot episode of the show, Kai Opaka is smartly conceived, a spiritual leader who is at once vaguely mystical and solidly grounded. Camille Saviola is cast somewhat against type in the role; she has the authority and the presence, but there's nothing remotely ethereal about her, which works to her (and the show's) advantage. She comes off a bit like the head nun of a liberal convent. She gets more screentime in "Battle Lines" than she does in "Emissary," and she gets more of a character as well; before, she was just the calm voice helping to guide Sisko toward the next phase of his life, while here, she actually has her own journey to follow. But that journey's impact is minimized by how little we're given to understand the Kai, or what motivates her. Her status as wise woman and seer make her innately more mystical and distant than the main cast, but too much of what she does here is motivated by discoveries and revelations made off screen. She arrives on DS9 because of a prophecy she doesn't really bring up; she dies; she's resurrected by the moon's nanobites; and then she decides to stay with the Ennis. Granted, she doesn't have much choice, as any attempt to leave the moon would result in her death, but it's still a decision, and a scene, which should carry more weight than it does. As it plays, only Kira's grief, and a few scenes with Dax, O'Brien, and Odo, give us any impression of how big a deal this is.

Still, if the show is going to go through the now-familiar growing pains of finding itself, it helps that the TOS-style plot that gives "Battle Lines" its spine is as decent as this one is. The episode is, unsurprisingly, fairly heavy handed. It's not [black-and-white racists](#) heavy-handed, but as metaphors go, you don't need to put a lot of interpretive work into unraveling authorial intent. The Ennis are battling the Nol. Shel-la, the leader of the Ennis, lays it out for Sisko with a world-weariness befitting an actor who would go on to play one of television's most beloved hitmen. (**Jonathan Banks**, as always and ever, is the man.) The two groups were exiled from their home world to serve as an example of eternal war. The moon they live on is infested with a kind of nanobite technology which keeps every living being perpetually alive, no matter how much damage they take from fighting and explosions and pointy rocks. They've been beating on each other for years now, and there's no end in sight. War is hell, and so on.

Okay, the idea here is somewhat predictable, but I like how it has a nasty edge to it. Shel-la certainly seems reasonable enough when he's talking with Sisko, Kira, Bashir, and the Kai, but the more he talks, the clearer it is how much the perpetual struggle has taken over his view of life, and how much he's

invested in two ideas: Life is agony, and the Nols are to blame for that agony. This makes trying to mediate a truce between the two groups somewhere between impossible, and really, really not possible. Sisko, who mistakenly believes he can help the Ennis and the Nol escape their punishment, tries to get Shel-la and his counterpart, Zlangco, to come to terms, if only to stop the fighting long enough to get everyone to safety. While it's not a huge surprise that the meeting goes sour, there's something convincing, and more than a little depressing, at just how easily attempts at communication can go awry. Also creepy is She-la's reaction when Bashir discovers a way to turn the nanobites off; while this would offer the Ennis and the Nol a chance to finally end their suffering, She-la is more interested in using the knowledge as a weapon.

This is all handled well, but it's an earnest attempt to teach us the same lesson so many shows, movies, and books have taught in the past, which means it's hard to get too worked up about the poor Ennis and horrid Nol. (No, wait, strike that, reverse it.) These characters are ciphers by design, stripped of personality to demonstrate how war turns people into ghosts (or something), and while that's symbolic, and true in its own way, it doesn't make for great drama. That leaves us with our main ensemble, and, thankfully, they do a decent job picking up the slack. Sisko is angrier than usual, nearly taking off Bashir's head when the doctor loses perspective in a moment of scientific curiosity, and yelling at Kira when she flirts with taking part in the fight against the Nol. In spite of Sisko's irritation, Bashir is likeable enough, and the episode even allows him a serious moment near the end, when he shows his disgust at Shel-la's desire to use medical aid as a weapon.

Kira gets the big moments, however, and even if I wished the episode had done more with those moments, they remain effective in their own right. The only one I'm not sold on (apart from her silly freak-out about the Cardassian records) is her grief over the Kai's death. Nana Visitor goes all out, and while I respect her commitment, it's an awkward scene, too brutally vulnerable to fit in with the rest of the hour. It doesn't help that Kai comes back to life some 10 minutes later. That's the main problem with Kira, though—her handful of scenes have a clear direction to them, but they don't connect properly with each other, or with the rest of the episode. I like them on their own, particularly Kira and Opaka's conversation near the end, when she talks about how confused and upset she is, but they're the start of something that never has a chance to get going. I don't mind the occasional sci-fi heavy-handedness—if I did, I wouldn't have watched this much *Star Trek*. But I do mind pushing aside interesting and potentially powerful character development in favor of the same old story about how war makes men into monsters. I don't care if people I haven't met before have lost their souls. I'm much more interested in how Kira goes about finding hers.

Stray observations:

- All of this happens on a moon, which makes you wonder what's going on back on the homeworld. Did everybody murder everyone else? Is Frank Gorshin chasing Lou Antonio through the ruins?
- Kai Opaka says her and Sisko's paths will cross again, which is nice. I wonder, though, how easily she'll be able to let go of Bajor. She didn't ask Sisko or the others to keep quiet about her

location, and it's not that far through the wormhole. Given how important she is to her people, it wouldn't surprise me if that moon saw a sharp increase in crash-landings.

- I'm disappointed that the next episode doesn't mention the Kai's absence. I would've assumed her being gone would have an enormous impact on Bajor.

"The Storyteller" (season 1, episode 14; originally aired 5/2/1993)

In which Chief O'Brien is the (temporarily) Chosen One...

This is a silly episode. While "Battle Lines" had the Moon of Doom, here we have the town where nobody got on well until someone made up a monster for them to hate. Well, something like that, anyway—it's a goofy conceit, made all the goofier by the outfits everyone's wearing. (*Trek* has never been a hotbed of fashion, but Bajoran style is like the wardrobe from a kid's show—minus the influence of LSD.) Thankfully, this unsubtle tale of fiction's power to do good in the world is leavened by the presence of a pairing I hope (and know) we'll be seeing more of: Dr. Bashir and Chief O'Brien. It's been a while since *Trek* dealt with the fact that, sometimes, colleagues don't like each other. While you could never be sure that McCoy didn't hate Spock's guts, on *Star Trek: The Next Generation's Enterprise*, everyone got on swimmingly with everyone else. Oh sure, Picard could be standoffish, and Barclay was a pill, but it was chums all around, generally.

Things aren't quite that comfortable on Deep Space Nine. Oh, it's not out and out war or anything, and so far, the personnel conflicts have largely been along the lines of "I respect you, but I have a problem with your judgment on this one." But still, Kira and Sisko yell at each other on occasion, and Odo and Sisko yell at each other sometimes, and, okay, Sisko has more of a strident command style than Picard ever did. (Which is not a criticism, by the way.) And, more importantly to the episode in question, O'Brien doesn't like Bashir. Prior to "The Storyteller," we've only seen evidence of this back in cold open of "[Q-Less](#)," where Bashir's (entirely successful) attempts to impress a Bajoran woman with his medical-school history irritates O'Brien to no end.

We don't get further justification for O'Brien's clear unhappiness at being assigned a mission with Bashir at the start of "The Storyteller," nor do we need any. Sometimes people just rub us the wrong way. Not that it's hard to understand the Chief's antipathy. I'm warming on Bashir—I have a soft spot for awkward characters, and I like how unabashedly tone-deaf the good doctor can be—but he's still not someone I want to share a runabout with if I can help it. So you've got two characters with differing views of each other, and, even better, differing views of the nature of their relationship (Julian thinks everything's cool), forced to spend time together in a strange place. That's dramatic and comedic gold right there, and it doesn't hurt that the two actors have solid chemistry. Much of their storyline is hard to take seriously, but their presence eases the pain, and turns "The Storyteller" from a chore to something mildly pleasant.

A Bajoran village is in danger, and Sisko sends Bashir and O'Brien to see if they can help. Turns out the danger is more complicated than a simple plague or epidemic. The village Sirah, a storyteller with an

important job, is dying. The village needs the Sirah to fight off a mysterious, malevolent entity known as the Dal'Rok. For five nights after each harvest, the Dal'Rok assaults the village, and it's only through the Sirah, and his ability to join the people together, that the creature is forced back. But now the current Sirah can no longer fulfill his duties, and the village is in a panic. Bashir can do nothing for the storyteller, as he's old and his organs are decaying, which isn't something you can walk off. It's up to the Sirah to choose his successor, and, for some reason, he picks O'Brien. Cue ensuing wackiness.

The only—and I repeat only—reason this development is tolerable is because Colm Meaney is good at his job, and Alexander Siddig does great work just standing off to one side, smirking. Otherwise, this is ridiculous, and weirdly insulting, as it comes down to one guy deciding that the only way to save his people is to make a monster that will convince them to stop fighting. This happened years ago, but the village has kept up the practice, and the only people who seem to know it's all a sham are the Sirah and his apprentice. But it's worse than that, as the Dal'Rok has actual physical presence, and does some decent damage when one of the storytelling nights goes badly. Hopefully the monster wouldn't go as far as destroying the village, but we're never given real assurance that it won't. None of this is connected to the Prophets, and it's hard to align it with what we know of the rest of Bajor. It's sort of like an old Western or safari movie where the civilized men stumble over a bunch of savages, and get mistaken for a god. It's not offensive so much as childish and dumb, but we're lucky Meaney has such a fun time being uncomfortable.

While all this silliness is going on, Sisko is attempting to aid in negotiations between two other Bajoran villages. One of them is led by a teenage girl, and this, astonishingly, creates some difficulties. Weirdly, most of those difficulties stem from the girl herself. The two towns are meeting over a border dispute; the official boundary is the river that runs between both towns, but that river has shifted, granting Varis' people, the Paqu, more land. The Navot aren't happy about this, but Varis is insistent that the land belongs to the Paqu. She assures Sisko and the Navot leader, Woban, that her people are willing to fight to the death to preserve their rights. This sets a confrontational tone for their, and is motivated less due to land, and more due to Varis' insecurity at taking over her father's job without any of his experience, or commanding the same level of respect as he once did. Instead of having her struggle to prove herself against a suspicious and doubting opponent, "The Storyteller" is more concerned with Varis overcoming her own fears. Woban is a jerk, sure, but Varis is as much, if not more, to blame.

This allows for an interesting, and not entirely awful, series of sequences in which Varis learns to accept her doubt through the magic of Nog and Jake. Not really kidding here: Nog takes a fancy to Varis as soon as she comes onboard the station, and he spends a lot of effort dragging Jake to the girl's quarters in an attempt to impress her. It's painfully awkward—Nog's sweaty, too-eager-to-please nervousness strikes close to home—but it's also subtler than I was expecting. The kids talk about their fathers, they play a silly prank (and we finally see Odo's bucket!), but Varis never tells Nog and Jake much about her political troubles, and they don't ask. That helps give their scenes together a light subtext; in particular, Gina Philips' (who still gets regular TV and occasional movie work—she was the sister in [Jeepers Creepers](#)) performance as Varis does a nice job straddling the line between barely

teenaged and old beyond her years. Of the episode's two storylines, this one is the one that's best in hindsight. It's predictable (although I like that Varis' eventual solution is a compromise, not a capitulation), but in a satisfying, believable way, that ups our esteem for Varis, Jake, Nog, and even Sisko.

O'Brien and Bashir fair similarly well with their storyline, although in their case, it's more due to the actors and the characters than it is to the plot. The Dal'Rok stuff is silly, in the tedious, let's underline our themes for extra credit way that so much socially conscious *Trek* can be. None of the characters involved outside the regulars make an impression, although I was intrigued by the vaguely homoerotic vibe coming off the Sirah/apprentice relationship. Besides, the title is a lie. Storytellers are important because the make up lies that tell us more about the world and ourselves. The old Sirah, the one from ages ago who created the Dal'Rok, he just gave a lie flesh to distract people from ever having to really change. We're supposed to walk away thinking that it's a good and noble thing that the apprentice has become the master, and that the village will continue its long tradition of yelling at clouds. But all I get is that a bunch of morons got to go on being morons. Ah well. At least Bashir and O'Brien are chummy afterward.

Stray observations:

- Something else to like about the Varis story: We don't see the resolution. Sure, you can be confident that she manages to get the compromise she wants, but I like that the episode doesn't feel we have to see it. The important part has already been accomplished. Everything else is just paperwork.
- Ha ha, it's funny when they offer O'Brien women, because... um... he's married and can't have sex with them? No, that's not it. Dang. I'll get back to you.

Next week: Kira tries to make some "Progress," and Dax gets to the bottom of what might happen "If Wishes Were Horses."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Progress”/“If Wishes Were Horses”**Zack Handlen**3/08/12 10:00AM**“Progress” (season 1, episode 15; originally aired 5/9/1993)***In which Kira makes a friend, and then burns down his house...*

It's not easy being a revolutionary. You're a minority against a controlling, entrenched force; you lack your enemies' resources, your loved ones are targets, and there is no safe ground to retreat to; and often, even the people you're fighting to free won't understand your cause, or will even prefer a dictatorship to the uncertainty and upheaval of a new regime. But at least in a revolution, you can believe in the purity of your intentions. In the heat of the moment, you know you're fighting for freedom from tyranny, for the end of oppression and the downfall of the cruel and merciless. You may lose your life, but it's a price you're willing to pay if it means that someday, justice may be served.

Say that day finally arrives. There are parades and speeches, and everyone puts in extra hours to make sure there's none of that crazy French Revolution-style fall-out. Further, say you succeed in not butchering your fellow revolutionaries in a frenzied, paranoid power grab, and that you manage to install an interim government that meets most, if not all, of your initial demands. All well and good, but at some point, being at the top means you're going to have to start compromising on some of those ideals you once held dear. This isn't a cynical or negative process; it's a simple fact of existence that not everyone wants the same thing, and doing your best to serve the needs of the many means every so often you have to royally screw over the few. That's how things are. You can make the world a better place, but you can't make it a perfect place, and that's a hard truth to realize. Revolutions have obvious villains. Reconstructions have gray areas and bad moods.

Such is the problem Major Kira Nerys faces in “Progress,” a terrific hour of television. For the first time, we have an episode of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* that delivers on potential instead of just hinting at it. The story is affecting, smart, and moves in unexpected ways, offering opportunities for characters and relationships to develop while still delivering a satisfying beginning, middle, and end. Kira once again takes center stage, and as with [“Past Prologue,”](#) she’s forced to make a decision between the monochromatic Bajoran ideals she once held and the political realities of a world struggling to rebuild. Here, though, there’s no convenient act of violence, however well-intended, to let her off the hook. In “Progress,” Kira has to accept that life isn’t always as simple as we need it to be, and being in a position of power means sometimes, you have to be the bad guy. All this, and we get a B-plot which manages to be both funny and, no joke, heart-warming. When I started this project, I expected I would come to appreciate *DS9* in its way as much as I appreciate [Star Trek](#) and [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#). I didn’t expect that appreciation would come so soon, and this has me very excited to see what the show’s like when it really gets good.

Initially, “Progress” follows a pattern which should be familiar to *TNG* fans: the crew of the *DS9* is working with Bajor on a science project. The Bajorans need energy, and to get it, they’re planning on tapping into the core of one of their moons, Jeraddo. The moon has been evacuated, and Kira and Dax are on a routine flyover when they pick up some telltale energy readings; looks like Jeraddo isn’t quite so evacuated after all. Promising Dax she’ll only be gone a few minutes, Kira beams down and is immediately menaced by a pair of mute Bajorans with farming implements. (In case you’ve never seen an agrarian horror movie, farm implements can be very, very menacing.) Another farmer, this one an older man who likes calling Kira “girl,” explains the situation: He and his friends are all refugees from the Cardassian camps. They’ve lived on this farm for the best years of their lives, and they have no intention of leaving now, no matter what anyone says.

This is a solid premise. *TNG* did a few variations on the same theme: individuals who refuse to compromise when faced with the demands of society. In the context of this episode, it’s a way to show the divisions in the still developing relationship between Bajor and the Federation. More importantly, it’s also a way to highlight the series’ strongest recurring trope so far: Kira’s struggle to define herself in a post-Cardassian landscape. Where [“Battle Lines”](#) spent too much time outlining a heavy-handed metaphor, “Progress” focuses the lion’s share of its 40 minutes on Kira’s relationship with Mullibok. This is a smart choice, and the episode succeeds in most every way “Battle Lines” failed, making a point based as much on character as it is on politics, and refusing to allow our heroes an easy exit from the conflict. The Moon of Eternal War in “Battle Lines” was hellish, no question, but, invading nano-particles aside, it was easy for Kira, Sisko, and Bashir to leave it behind. On this week’s moon, life isn’t so simple.

The most obvious difficulty is Mullibok (Brian Keith), the older Bajoran farmer refusing to leave Jeraddo. Mullibok is everything you don’t want in a friendly enemy: He’s charming, intelligent, and completely unwilling to change his mind. Worse, he’s thought through his position. He knows he’ll die if he stays, but he’s convinced he’ll also die if he goes, and he’d rather die at home. This is difficult to argue against. Kira doesn’t want anyone to die, but she also doesn’t want to have to force anyone to

move at phaser-point. If Mullibok and his companions (who are mute, thanks to the Cardassians) already understand the consequences of their actions, there isn't anything she can threaten them with. Her only hope is to talk through the situation, and try to find some way to convince Mullibok that not dying really is the better option here, however worried or afraid he is of change. This is what Kira does, although she does more listening than talking for most of the episode, and it's her back-and-forth with Mullibok that gives "Progress" its soul. Keith is a fine actor (his **IMDB** page features some impressive credits), and he and Nana Visitor have excellent chemistry together, the sort that achieves connection even after only a few minutes of screentime. Mullibok tells exaggerated stories of his life, calls Kira a pretty girl, and generally makes a nuisance of himself, while Kira struggles between irritation and a growing affection. Much in the way that "Progress" initially follows a common *TNG* story pattern, the friendship between the farmer and the major runs along well-established lines: the wise old mentor teaching a brash up-and-comer some simple truths about the world.

What's great, though, is that isn't what this relationship is. While Kira is charmed and moved by Mullibok's struggles, she doesn't think he's right in his cause, at least not entirely. When she decides to stay on Jeraddo with the old man after the first attempt to forcibly remove him and his friends goes awry, her decision is driven by a number of complex emotions: guilt over Mullibok's injuries, concern for his well-being, and, perhaps most strongly, an inability to let go of the past in order to prepare for the future. Mullibok repeatedly makes connections between his struggles against the Bajoran government, and the Bajorans' fight against the Cardassians, but the resemblance is, at best, a shallow one; Mullibok claims his stubbornness can save him, but it won't, and both he and Kira realize this. The difference is, Mullibok doesn't have to act on this knowledge—he's decided he's ready to die for what he believes in. That leaves Kira to resolve the issue, and that means it's Kira who is ultimately the more adult. Other characters offer advice, most notably Sisko, who tells her she has to get used to being on the side of the people who are in power, however unpleasant that may be. In the end, though, it's Kira who has to realize the limitations of Mullibok's obstinacy, as she's forced to come to terms with the fact that, unlike fighting the Cardassians, government is a battle with few clear victories, and constant, often agonizing attrition.

Most of "Progress" is spent getting to the heart of Kira's dilemma, but the episode also finds time for a light-hearted B-plot, a story about Nog and Jake's business adventures that manages the double trick of being both effective comic relief and a winning use of Ferengi avarice. While he and Jake are playing cards in Quark's bar, Nog overhears Quark yelling at his father for a bad supplies order. Nog thinks this could be an opportunity, and quickly goes about trying to sell his father's order, a shipment of yamok sauce which has been rendered largely useless now that the Cardassians have left the station. While he isn't able to profit immediately off the sauce, he does find someone whose willing to trade a load of self-sealing stem bolts for the shipment; Nog is reluctant to accept, but Jake convinces him that this is a good idea, and a handshake later, the two boys are trying to find someone, anyone, to pay them for an item they don't understand.

It's fun to watch Nog and Jake work together, especially once you understand where their efforts are headed. One barter leads to another barter, until finally, the boys get their hands on something that

someone will actually pay money for: land. (Or as Nog keeps insisting, “Dirt.”) None of this connects directly into Kira’s efforts on Jeraddo, although the “Noh-Jay consortium” is a more optimistic take on the importance of negotiation, compromise, and patience. Combined, however, these two plots make for the best episode of the show thus far, and one that demonstrates the ways that *DS9* is already staking out new territory. Unlike *TNG*, the show can handle entertaining comic storylines without compromising characters or engaging in outright camp; and unlike *TNG*, it’s willing to allow its heroes to be just as complicated as its guest stars. In the end, Kira destroys Mullibok’s house herself, saving his life and, most likely, ending their friendship. It’s probably the right choice, but the episode ends without giving us a comforting final thought from Sisko or Dax, and no sense that Kira is happy with what’s she’s done. It’s this kind of uncertainty that leads to great art, and having it become an integral part of the show’s texture means this episode more than lives up to its name.

Stray observations:

- Morn has been hitting on Dax, and she’s slightly interested. Enjoy that image.
- Kira’s my favorite character on the show right now, but what’s impressing me more and more each week is how much I like the entire ensemble. With *TNG* (which I still love, in case that’s in question), it took at least a season before I found anyone beyond Picard and Data worth watching. On *DS9*, the only bad apple in the bunch is Dax, and she’s just bland, not actively irritating.

“If Wishes Were Horses” (season 1, episode 16; originally aired 5/16/1993)

In which there are no horses...

After the newfound heights of “Progress,” “If Wishes Were Horses” gets back to the important business of mistaking molehills for mountains. Where the previous episode did a fine job subverting expectations established by *TNG*, this entry follows the predictable path laid out all the way back in the original series: namely, that the universe is full of whimsical, hyper-powerful alien beings who like to show up every once in a while and screw around with the norms.

The first sign that something is wrong comes when Chief O’Brien finds a horrible little man in his daughter’s bedroom. O’Brien had been telling his daughter the story of Rumpelstiltskin just a moment before, and now, it seems, the fairy tale dwarf with a knack for spinning straw into gold has come to life, and decided to mess around with Molly and her parents. That’s bad enough, but strange things are happening all over the station. A famous baseball player, Harmon Bokai, followed Jake home from the holosuite because he was hungry, and Bashir, after striking out with Dax for the umpteenth time, is woken mid-nap by a suddenly interested and very frisky Jadzia. On Deep Space Nine, fantasies are coming to life, and, unsurprisingly, it’s not as much fun as it sounds.

In order to create a sense of urgency, the station is also threatened by the development of a space rupture that could, if allowed unchecked, take out half the system. But (SPOILER ALERT), there’s no rupture. It’s just another example of fantasy, coming into existence when Dax started looking for

something unusual right after everyone's dreams are made flesh. She saw one thing, wondered if it might be something else, and ZAP ZOOM ZOWIE, it was. Sisko realizes this just in time, calls the fantasy's bluff, and life is returned to normal. In the last scene, "Harmon Bokai" stops by Sisko's office to explain that he, along with all the other fantasies, is part of a different race which is attempting to study the power of imagination. Bokai and Sisko have a nice little chat, Bokai makes the standard, "Maybe we'll see you around" speech, and that's that.

I don't hate this sort of thing—really I don't—but it's pointless. For an hour, the show is transformed into a kid's cartoon, and not a very good kid's cartoon at that. The explanation as to how all the wishes are coming true is the worst kind of *Trek* laziness, the sort of thing which worked in the original series only because everything it did was so new and exciting. By now, any time anything weird happens, your first guess is either "space-time anomaly" or "aliens screwing around." Whenever either of these is right, it makes the whole episode pointless. *DS9* doesn't need to pull off striking character growth every week, but there's something depressing in seeing the show push itself to expand its horizons, and then immediately backtracking into the same old hoary crap. Genre should never be an excuse for lazy storytelling; just because you can say, "A wizard did it" doesn't mean you should. While "If Wishes Were Horses" tries to justify its foolishness with some sop about how wonderful the imagination is (how is it possible to have a mind interested in and capable of studying other species and not have imaginations? In order to innovate, you need be able to imagine new ideas), but that just makes it worse. It's not just a story of magical aliens; it's a story of magical aliens who remind us how wonderful we really are. Bleagh.

It's not a total wash. While this is all silly, and various castmembers are asked to engage in the silliness, no one embarrasses themselves. O'Brien is once again put in the role of baffled, put-upon Everyman, and while he's sidelined for most of the hour, he does get some nice material near the end, when Rumpelstiltskin offers to save everyone from the rupture, so long as O'Brien is willing to give up his first born. Meanwhile, Bashir's fantasy Dax means that Terry Farrell spends half the episode groping Alexander Siddig and being disappointed when he doesn't return the favor; it's, again, goofy, but not unpleasantly so, and the show veers away from spending much time on how the fantasy Dax makes the real Dax feel. Sisko and Bokai's conversations have a certain authenticity, and there's an unexpected, brief scene in which all three major fantasy characters meet and talk about how their relationships are working out. We rarely see these stories from the meddling aliens' side.

Still, none of the good points are enough to save this from being a waste of resources, and evidence that, despite signs to the contrary, the show still has a ways to go toward finding itself. Although really, hoping that a *Trek* series would ever say goodbye to the occasional visit from a nutty Godlike Being is a futile endeavor. Hopefully *DS9* will eventually stop engaging in the sort of lazy, trope-ridden writing sessions that lead to tomfoolery like "If Wishes Were Horses." If not, this is small price to pay for the highlights.

Stray observations:

- I did enjoy the beginning of Odo's attempt to address the patrons of Quark's bar: "Ladies and gentlemen and all androgynous creatures..."
- Bokai's comment to Sisko about why imagination amazes them is nicely meta: "That you can have such an affection for someone you've never met."

Next week: Lwaxana Troi arrives on the station, making us "The Forsaken," and people start acting all crazy in "Dramatis Personae."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Forsaken”/“Dramatis Personae”[Zack Handlen](#)[3/15/12 10:00AM](#)**“The Forsaken” (season 1, episode 17; originally aired 5/23/1993)***In which there is no love in an elevator, but some minor understanding in a turbolift*

There’s an elevator in the library where I work, and I use it every day. Part of my job (my non-pop-culture-ingesting-and-scoring-cheap-points job) is pulling books and periodicals from various floors, so every morning, I grab a cart, and hit the stacks. That means, on average, between seven to ten elevator trips per day. It’s not something I think about much, except when I bump into someone else. Then it gets awkward. Other staff, custodians, faculty, and students also use the elevator, and as much as I might try to avoid it, every once in a while, someone’s waiting ahead of me. Or, worse, they show up while I’m waiting, and then it’s all a lot of avoiding eye contact and trying to look like I’m not avoiding eye contact because that would make it weird. Worst of all is when the elevator arrives, and the other person assumes we’re going to share the ride. I’m more than willing to wait, and the cart helps me pretend it’s entirely due to space concerns; really, though, I just don’t like sharing an elevator with people. I like everyone I work with, and I have absolutely nothing against anyone else at the school, but there’s something unavoidably intimate about being in a small space with a stranger, even if its only for a few moments. In my ideal world, I would never have to be that close to anyone unless I chose to be. But life doesn’t work like that. Eventually, someone’s to cram themselves in next to you, ask you how your day is going, and keep on talking whether you answer them or not.

There’s an elevator in “The Forsaken,” although because this is science fiction, everyone goes to great lengths to call it a turbolift. Odo gets trapped on one with the visiting Lwaxana Troi, and, at first, it’s about as awkward as you’d imagine. Awkwardness is the main theme of this week’s first episode,

featuring prominently in all three of its plotlines. There's Odo, fending off Lwaxana's advances until there's no place left to hide; Bashir, stuck playing nanny for a trio of impossible to please and insufferably arrogant ambassadors; and O'Brien, whose problems with the Cardassian computer system. Those problems seem to go away when a mysterious probe comes through the wormhole and infects the station, and it's this infestation which gives the episode its hook. As hooks go, however, this is about as indifferent as you can imagine. O'Brien downloads information off the probe's hard drive to study it, and strange things start happening; Dax theorizes that the information they downloaded is actually a form of non-biological life; and O'Brien ultimately creates a programmed playground for the "creature" to hang out in.

Probe-wise, that's really it. The "non-biological life form" is an intriguing idea, but the episode never goes very far with it. The various *Treks* have used this set-up—stumbling across an unknown device that takes over the ship/station—many, many times before, and the handling of it here is perfunctory to the point of self-parody. The only confirmation that any of Dax and O'Brien's theories are right is that they're able to resolve the station's difficulties by following through on their hypothesis. That's certainly logical, but it also leaves us with a storyline that never goes beyond the surface. Much the same could be said for the tale of Bashir's struggles with the ambassadors. They're pompous prats, and he's stuck toadying to them and desperately trying to keep them happy while Sisko avoids their requests. This happens a few times, then everything on the station goes to hell, and Bashir is trapped in a corridor with the group after an explosion. His quick thinking gets them all to the safety of a maintenance duct, and the last we see of the ambassadors, they're praising Bashir to the heavens and calling him "Julian."

Both of these plots are enjoyable in their way, but there isn't much to them. We don't learn much about the ambassadors, beyond the fact that they confirm the usual *Trek* suspicion of bureaucracy, and Bashir's "solution" to dealing with them is, essentially, "Just wait until something blows up." There's a certain level of competence, be it in television, film, or literature, that's difficult to effectively criticize, and the tales of O'Brien and the Probe, and the Doctor vs. the Dickheads, fall into that level. I could point out that the ambassadors are stereotypes, or that the probe itself is a cliché, but that would require a specific resentment or disappointment on my part which doesn't exist. These are small pieces with minimal ambition, and they hit their marks. Dax and O'Brien get to team up for a while, which makes me like them more; and Bashir gets to be routinely humbled and embarrassed, which makes me like him more. The show can do better, but it's easy to spend too much time criticizing an episode for what it might have been. So let's just say that this was fine, and move on to what really matters.

In this case, that's the third plotline, and easily the most meaningful of the bunch: Odo's relationship with Lwaxana. Truth be told, if "The Forsaken" (whose title is, so far as I can tell, even more meaningless than usual) lacked this final element, I'd probably be harder on its other, less powerful segments; but while trapping two disparate characters together in an enclosed space is about as stock a TV situation as one can imagine, the drama and catharsis these two generate help justify every other aspect of the episode.

Lwaxana Troi has always been a problematic character. She first appeared in the season one [*Star Trek: The Next Generation*](#) episode [*“Haven,”*](#) where she served in the capacity of the annoying relative everyone has to put up with because she’s really a good person deep down. As Deanna Troi’s mother, Lwaxana (Majel Barrett) was by turns shrill, aggressive, cloying, and, in her best moments, convincingly melancholic, and whether or not she was tolerable depended on what version of the character the writers decided to have show up this week. As conceived, the character could’ve worked, but *TNG* too often struggled with how to use her, relying too often on the painfully unfunny “comedy” of an older woman being sexually aggressive and rude. At times, we were allowed a more complex view, and Barrett was usually able to deliver in this moments; mostly, though, she just shrieked at her daughter and assaulted Jean-Luc Picard with innuendo.

At first, “The Forsaken” seems to be following the same path. Lwaxana is the fourth ambassador, and when someone tries to steal her brooch in Quark’s bar, and Odo catches the thief, the Betazoid woman is immediately taken with him. Odo, unsurprisingly, doesn’t know what to make of her interest. At first, he doesn’t understand that she’s flirting with him, and then he’s uncomfortable and asks Sisko for help. Sisko, in essence, shrugs and tells him to deal with it himself. All of this should be familiar to *TNG* fans, right down to the way Odo sticks his head out to see if Lwaxana is around before entering a room. It’s a little less painful than Picard’s attempts to dodge the lady, but that’s because Picard was ostensibly the most powerful man on the Enterprise, and his cowardly avoidance of Lwaxana never really made much sense—it was more something that was done because someone thought it would be funny than it was in keeping with his character. Like Picard, Odo is confident in his own world, but not comfortable with socializing, but Odo’s discomfort stems from his own rarefied existence. He’s never quite sure how he should behave around anyone when it’s not a business matter (which is why he gets on with Quark, really; every conversation they have is about business), and Lwaxana’s rudeness just throws his essential oddness into sharper focus. We can laugh at his embarrassment, but sympathize with him as well.

It’s harder to sympathize with Lwaxana, at least at first. If I have a complaint about their story, it’s that Lwaxana’s sudden interest in Odo is a little too sudden, but then, that’s always been the way with her. People who push themselves on other people have always rubbed me the wrong way, and I never found Pepe Le Pew, Ms. Troi’s clearest spiritual ancestor, all that amusing. Thankfully, we’re given reason to like her once she and Odo get trapped in the turbolift. Initially, Lwaxana gets nervous and can’t stop talking, while Odo reacts as one might expect him to react, with a lot of rolled eyes and groans. But in this context, Lwaxana’s chatter goes from pushy and irritating to a little sad. If you’ve ever watched *TNG*, this revelation won’t come as a surprise, but Lwaxana has always been a little sad, all the more so because she herself recognizes it. She wears colorful clothes and exotic wigs, she insists on getting whatever she wants, and she keeps shoving herself into other people’s lives because she’s rather lonely, and terrified of ever looking into the mirror and seeing something less than extraordinary.

That’s fine for what it is, but “The Forsaken” becomes exceptional when it also takes the time to get inside Odo’s head. Every 16 hours, Odo becomes a liquid, and his time runs out in the lift, forcing him

to show a side of himself to Lwaxana that he's never revealed to anyone before. It comes in stages; first he starts to sweat, then his face melts, and then his entire body loses solidity. For the first time, we learn where Odo became who he is today, in a Bajoran testing facility, and we find out that he spent much of his "childhood" changing his shape so he could impress the scientists. So for as long as he can remember, he hasn't belonged, and the only way he could attract attention was by showing just how different he is. He's established himself on Deep Space Nine, and while he uses his ability in pursuit of criminals, it's more a super-power than it is a defining trait. His Odo-ness is unquestioned, and maybe the reason he's so gruff and single-minded is the same reason he moves so stiffly, and his features are nearly, but not exactly, human—being a person, for Odo, requires a conscious and constant act of will.

It's not surprise, then, that he doesn't want to show himself in his purest form to anyone. None of us would want that. While Odo's position is more explicit, being human, and being around other people, already requires an effort. The face we show the world is self-constructed; for some of us, the construction is more laborious than it is for others, but every inch of it is the face we made, feature by feature, choice by choice. Lwaxana understands this better than most, and she's able to convey her understanding to Odo in way that allows him to finally let himself go. There's always been something a little contrived about the elder Troi, a little forced and manufactured, and "The Forsaken" finds a way to use what could've been a writing flaw to its benefit. "I've never cared to be ordinary," she tells Odo, and while that sadness remains, there's something beautiful in it as well. In her way, Lwaxana is as much a misfit as Odo, whether by her choosing, or else by some fundamental aspect of her personality that drives her to make her choices. At the end of the episode, Lwaxana flirts one last time before walking off, and for once, the sight didn't make me flinch. She may not be the easiest person in the world to deal with, but some people are worth the effort.

Stray observations:

- The effect of Odo collapsing into liquid and Lwaxana catching him in her dress is a fine idea which doesn't really work on screen. I like the concept enough to give it a pass, though.

"Dramatis Personae" (season 1, episode 18; originally aired 5/30/1993)

In which we weave a tangled web

Once again, we've got what could've easily been the premise of a [Star Trek](#) or *TNG* episode, and once again, the *DS9* writers give enough information to justify the main plot without bothering to go any deeper. The set-up here is hilariously sketchy: a Klingon ship, doing a survey in the Gamma Quadrant, stumbles across some energy spheres that contain the history of a long dead race. The spheres infect the Klingons, forcing the ship's crew to re-enact ancient power struggles, and when the last Klingon survivor arrives on DS9, he dies, but not before infecting most of the crew. Ostensibly, this is another parable about the dangers of obsessive conflict and greed, but we're never told anything about the race that created the spheres, and we never know if the spheres were intended as their memorial, or

simply their way to share the wealth. There's no time put into explaining how the spheres could have such an effect, and Odo's method for defeating them is the usual tech-speak silliness. It's hard to ignore the fact that we're still in the first season, and we've already had seemingly half a dozen of these Wormhole Of The Week storylines.

But it doesn't matter. Oh sure, it could matter down the line, and the more often the show uses this trope, the more strained it will seem. But if the results are as consistently entertaining and energetic as the theatrics we get in "Dramatis Personae," it'll be hard to object to a little predictability. "The Forsaken" used a goofy premise to get in some lovely character development; "Dramatis Personae" uses the same, and while there's no great revelation here as there was between Odo and Lwaxana, the result is still better than you'd expect. We already know that there's some stress between Kira and Sisko. This was established in the pilot, and nothing we see in this episode changes what we know, or offers much surprise. It doesn't need to. This is play, pure and simple. It's also great proof of how competently the show has managed to establish its ensemble. The great pleasure in this kind of episode is seeing familiar faces behave in unexpected ways. That doesn't work if the cast is ill-defined, and the boundaries between them unclear.

Kira is upset. A Valerian ship wants to dock at the station, and she believes the Valerians sold weapons to the Cardassians during the war. She wants to hold them on charges of war profiteering, but she doesn't have proof, and Sisko won't let her search the ship without good reason. They have a discussion about this, but they manage to reach a decent compromise. Kira will continue her investigations, and Sisko will make sure she doesn't overreach. Then a Klingon from the science vessel Toh'Kaht is beamed over to DS9 before his ship explodes. He says one word—"Victory"—and then dies, but not before making sure everyone on the station's bridge is going to have a fun time for the next few days. Kira suddenly gets it into her head that she has enough to search the Valerians' ship after all, and when Sisko objects, she starts asking questions of the rest of the crew. Questions about loyalty, and about whose side everyone is on, and about what's going to happen when her current argument with Sisko finally erupts into outright conflict.

While Kira gets her evil on, Sisko becomes fascinated with clock-building; O'Brien decides it's his job to defend Sisko from Bajoran predations; Dax gets lost in her own memories; and Bashir, well, Bashir becomes slightly devious. The doctor spends most of this episode on the back bench, which is too bad, but thankfully Evil Kira and Evil O'Brien (and Sort Of Evil But Also Crazy Sisko) offer more than enough amusement. After weeks of being racked by self-doubt, guilt, and insecurity, Nana Visitor seems to relish the chance to enjoy herself, and she goes to it with gusto, flirting with Odo, throttling Quark, and basically proving that, if she ever really wanted to, she could make one hell of a villain. O'Brien does his best, but he can't really match her. She's got the contacts aboard the station that O'Brien and Sisko lack, and more importantly, she's got a gusto for her work that the Chief can't really compete with. Maybe we can take that as character development. O'Brien: decent chap, and smart in his work, but not really suited for the role of tyrannical power behind the throne. Kira: Bad-ass held largely in check by her conscience. Sisko: when allowed to follow his deepest impulses, makes clocks.

That works all right, but it's certainly not necessary to believe any of it to enjoy the episode. This is where our lack of knowledge about the spheres becomes more problematic. We don't know how much of what Kira and the rest do is informed by their actual personalities, and how much of it is created by whatever force infects them. Kira apologizes at the end for her behavior, and Sisko accepts her apology, but it doesn't seem like something she needed to say. While *DS9* has yet to fully invest in serialization, it has done well at character continuity, and in that regard, "Dramatis Personae" plays like an exception which proves the rule. Sisko and Kira's relationship, and by extension the Federation's relationship with the unsteady Bajor, has been building for a while, and the conflict which plays out here is one possibly outcome of that relationship. But it's also entirely disconnected to who these characters are.

About the only character who gets to stay himself for any substantial amount of time is Odo, who is having something of a banner week. Apart from a single, terrifyingly convincing seizure in Quark's bar, Odo is unaffected by the infecting influence, and it's up to him to stop everyone else from murdering each other. He goes about this with a minimum of fuss, which is another reason to like this episode. In most other shows doing a body-snatching plot (or mind-corruption, or whatever you want to call it), the hero takes a while to catch on, and even when he suspects something is amiss, he can't help himself from being confused, or trying to appeal to the reason of his friends and co-workers. It does take Odo time to realize what's happened, long enough for me to wonder, at first, if he hadn't also been affected, but once he catches on, he doesn't question it. Better still, he uses his knowledge to his advantage, playing Sisko and Kira off each other as needed, and even convincing Devious Bashir to help him find a solution to the invasion. Odo is immune because he doesn't have the same sort of insides as the rest of the crew, but it makes sense from a character perspective that he'd be the one to recognize the problem. His whole life has been built around watching others for cues on how to behave; he'd realize quicker than anyone else when that behavior turned sour. I thought last week that Kira was by far my favorite part of the ensemble, and "Dramatis Personae" certainly doesn't do her any harm. But Odo is also terrific. The first season of *DS9* has its faults, but it's showing, week in and week out, that when you have the ensemble and a world worth building, those faults are fleeting.

Stray observation:

- It's a throwaway line, but someone, I believe Odo, explains that the Klingon from the Toh'Kaht brought the sphere influence to the bridge crew. Which means that the only people who should've been affected were those characters on the bridge when the Klingon was beamed over. There are going to be some complicated questions in the next few weeks from all the guards and personnel who tried to help Kira fight a rebellion.
- I wonder why Dax got so distracted? It was funny, and worked well for the actress, but there's never any explanation for it.
- **Straight guys, talkin' 'bout *Trek*:** Nana Visitor is feisty when she's villainous.

Next week: We come to the end of the first season with "Duet" and "In The Hands Of The Prophets."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Duet”[Zack Handlen](#)[3/22/12 10:00AM](#)**“Duet” (season 1, episode 20; originally aired 6/13/1993)***In which Kira learns a new song, much to her regret*

There are impossible situations. They happen every day, and we’re all a part of them, and we live with it. You couldn’t exist in this world if you didn’t. As I type this, people are suffering. Some of them are starving, some of them are being assaulted, tortured, mutilated, and, well, this is already getting too grim for a *Star Trek* review, but you feel me, right? As individuals, we can sign petitions, we can post pleas for sanity on the web, and we can do what we can with whatever we come across in our own lives, but we are largely powerless to change the course of the world. It’s not defeatism or an excuse to say there are limits to the effect of good intentions; it’s simple plain facts. But it’s also impossible, because we’re taught that you can’t be a good person and allow others to suffer. No, it’s more than that: It’s something most of us feel intuitively, without having to be told. Empathy is one of the most valuable tools at our disposal as human beings. It makes solitary existence less lonely, and it allows us to grow societies where immediate reward isn’t the primary motivation. And yet, ultimately, it doesn’t make us superheroes. There’s only so much you can do, and the only way to survive is to find some balance between the impossible and what you need to let you sleep at night. And even that’s too much to ask in some situations. When the harm is so big, and the bodies are all around you, balance is lost. And so you fall, and you keep falling, and the most you can hope for is maybe, someday, you’ll hit bottom.

Once upon a time, the Cardassians controlled Bajor, and they did horrible things. We’ve heard about the occupation before, but in “Duet,” Kira gives a speech about what she saw while liberating a forced-

labor camp, and it's the most direct description of the atrocities committed against her people that the show has given us. She talks about broken bodies, minds destroyed, and of captives humiliated, starved, and beaten, and her voice catches on the words. So when an apparent survivor from the camp arrives on the station, she's eager to meet him. The visitor requires immediate treatment for an affliction known as Kalla-Nohra, which only affects individuals who were at Gallitepp, the labor camp, during a mining accident. Kira rushes to the infirmary to greet the new guest, but instead of a Bajoran, she finds a Cardassian named Aamin Marritza receiving Bashir's ministrations. Kira demands Marritza's immediate arrest, because she knows he had to have been there, and he has to be responsible. Except Marritza denies any direct involvement in the torture of Bajoran citizens; he claims he was just a file clerk. Kira thinks he's lying, and that's when things get interesting.

The specter of the Cardassian occupation has hung over *Deep Space Nine* from the beginning. Ostensibly, Sisko and the rest of the Starfleet personnel are on board DS9 to help usher Bajor into the Federation, but they also serve as a deterrent, should the Cardassians ever get it into their heads to pick up where they left off. The occupation shaped Kira, made her the troubled, impassioned woman she is when we first meet her; it also fractured her culture, leaving the Bajoran people insecure, jumpy, and overeager to prove themselves. (It also made them even more dependent on religion for cultural identity, which is something we'll get into next week.) The technology on the station was designed by Cardassians, so every day going into work means dealing with a history that's literally built into the scenery. Capturing someone from Gallitepp is a huge coup, not just for Kira but for the whole Bajoran race, because here is someone they can punish. That's one of the ways we deal with those impossible situations: We decide who's responsible, and then we hold them accountable, and we call it justice. It doesn't bring back the dead, and it can't ever change the past or clean off the blood, but it at least creates an illusion of continuity. This man did a bad thing, but now he'll suffer the consequences. Thus a senseless act gains a structure. It is now its own story: victims, suffering, prosecution, catharsis. Once pain has been incorporated into a narrative, we're on our way to processing it.

The drawback to this is that deep down, we know justice won't change the past, and the only way to deal with that uncomfortable knowledge is to get angry. When we're angry at someone, we aren't sad about someone else, and that's a relief; but the anger needs to be fed, and it needs a target, which puts us in the uncomfortable position of putting emotion ahead of judgement. To a certain extent, that's what happens in "Duet." As soon as Kira sees that Marritza is a Cardassian, she's determined to see him back on Bajor to be tried for his crimes, but the situation doesn't add up. Sisko has doubts, and while he's sympathetic to Kira, he insists she follow due process. The Bajorans aren't shy about putting the pressure on Sisko, and it's to his credit that he doesn't bend or back down. It's a trait he's demonstrated convincingly throughout the first season. He's reasonable, sympathetic, and open to discussion, but he will not be pushed into anything. At the same time, he can change his mind if given cause. Realizing it would be hard for Kira to maintain objectivity, Sisko initially puts Odo in charge of the Marritza investigation. But Kira pleads with him that she can follow procedure and be impartial as necessary, and that it's important that a Bajoran should be handling what is, in a way, Bajoran

business. Sisko agrees, and puts her in command. It's an important step in their ongoing relationship, because he's trusting her. He has every reason not to, and it's not as though Kira has always presented herself as a model of poise and detachment. But for them to work together, he needs to allow her opportunities to prove herself. Trust only really means anything when it comes with a certain level of risk.

The heart of "Duet," and the scenes which give the episode its name, are the conversations between Kira and the imprisoned Marritza. The Cardassian suspect is played by Harris Yulin (a character actor who has been a lot of TV and film; as someone on Twitter pointed out, he was the "hanging judge" in *Ghostbusters 2*), and the actor does a tremendous job in conveying a complex, often obscured personality without ever appearing inconsistent or vague. We don't know the real truth about Marritza until the very end of the hour, but when the final reveal is made, everything building up to it makes sense. That's partly due to some great writing (the episode has three credited contributors: Peter Allan Fields wrote the teleplay, and Lisa Rich and Jeanne Carrigan-Fauci provided the story), and partly due to Yulin. Guest stars have to create convincing, compelling characters in a very short period of time, and Yulin is immediately fascinating. He and Nana Visitor bounce off each other beautifully, and where other actors might have been too vague—playing Marritza's obfuscation as opacity—Yulin is specific. There's a strong sense from the start the character is hiding something, and Yulin uses this to draw in both us *and* Kira. He can't be a simple file clerk, obviously. He has to have some secret so dark he can't bear to let it go.

Marritza lies for most of the episode, and one of the reasons his interactions with Kira are so interesting is that his lies always feed into what she wants to hear. At first, he denies that he's afflicted with Kalla-Nohra; he's a simple file clerk, he has Pottrick Syndrome, they have similar symptoms, he's being persecuted, etc. But Bashir runs a test that confirms the disease, so Marritza shifts to a new tactic. Yes, he was at Gallitepp, but he still was nothing but a file clerk. He had no part in any violence. He might have heard the occasional scream, but what of it? He argues that Gallitepp's reputation as a Hell on Bajor was entirely fabricated by the camp's director, Gul Darhe'el, in a brilliant propaganda move to put fear into the hearts of Bajorans everywhere. Given what Kira's seen, this is obviously untrue, and when taken at their word, Marritza's argument makes no sense: He claims it was easier to fake a slaughterhouse than it was to kill for real, and that doesn't parse out. But what he's saying doesn't need to be believable, because he's not saying it to persuade Kira to let him go. He tells these lies to needle her. First the denial of his own involvement, then the denial of the event itself, both falsehoods carefully constructed to drive a wounded idealist out of her mind with rage.

Besides, she wants him to be guilty—any sane person would. Imagine it's just after the second World War, and you find a Nazi living next door. When you go to turn him in, would it be better if he was Himmler, head of the Gestapo and destroyer of thousands of lives, or Hans, the schmuck who kept his eyes down and made sure the reports were turned in on time? The greater the evil, the more satisfying the punishment; it even makes for a better story, because the former has drama, while the latter complicates the dilemma, forcing you to perform a sort of moral algebra with yourself as the main variable. I would never be a Himmler, or a Hitler, or any other powerful monster, because I lack

the desire (and the capacity) for cruelty on such a grand scale. But I am also kind of a coward, and while I'd like to believe I'd stand up if the Nazis (or any other monstrous organization) took power, I don't know for sure. So how do you punish someone for not being heroic? How can you get that catharsis, that grief-mollifying click, when the situation becomes more complex than "Good" versus "Really, really, really bad"?

Kira is convinced something is going on, so she (with some help from Odo and a few others) keeps digging. She eventually hits what must seem like pay dirt: An old photo of the camp reveals that Marritza is apparently lying about his identity. He's no file clerk—he's Gul Darhe'el in the flesh. It's hard to imagine a more perfect outcome. When Kira confronts Marritza with her discovery, he switches from manipulative deceiver to bombastic demagogue, spouting off about the inferiority of the Bajoran race, how the people needed to be cleansed, and how he has no regrets. He's spiteful, unashamed, and utterly despicable, providing Kira with the sort of ideal, ends-tied-neatly resolution one rarely finds in real life.

But it isn't true. That would be too easy. Odo gets a call from Gul Dukat, and when he tells the Cardassian who they have in custody, Dukat is astonished. Darhe'el, he insists, is dead; he died years ago, and was buried with full military honors on Cardassia Prime. This puts Kira in a quandary. She has the evidence of her eyes, she has a prisoner who's confessed to his crimes, and what's more, she has that ache she needs to take care of. The want which is really just a need you pretend you can forestall. Because if the prisoner isn't Darhe'el, not only is she robbed of immediate resolution, she and the Bajorans will never be able to bring the real butcher of Gallitepp into the light. If the real Darhe'el is dead, he died peacefully among his own people, who revere him as a war hero. His victims, the bodies "who moved too slowly and never moved again" won't ever be at peace. Still, Kira has principles, and she know she has to find the truth. She works with Odo, and finally, they realize that Marritza can't be Darhe'el. Darhe'el wasn't at Gallitepp on the day of the accident which caused the Kalla-Nohra disease. So the Cardassian sitting in a cell on DS9 is someone else entirely. But who? And why would he pretend to be the Devil himself?

Going by the details, it's a ridiculous twist: Marritza really was a file clerk at Gallitepp, and, haunted by the memory of the suffering and atrocities committed there, he decided to take extreme action. Believing a trial was the only way to bring Cardassian guilt to light, he surgically altered his face to look like Gul Darhe'el, and then travelled to DS9, where he knew Kira would recognize the implications of his Kalla-Nohra, and that she'd also persecute him with every means at her disposal. He then gave her a series of false stories, to make the "real" false story all the more convincing. It's a plan worthy of a Bond villain, even if it was executed with the purest of intentions, and requires a significant suspension of disbelief. It works, though, mainly for two reasons: This is a science fiction show, and it's okay if the details are a little ridiculous; and even if the plot itself is far-fetched, the core emotions driving it resonate strongly enough that nitpicking becomes irrelevant. "Duet" doesn't argue that Marritza suffered worse than the Bajorans; it just suggests that the impact of a horrific crime goes beyond the fate of the victims. Marritza is not a bad man, and while it would be easy to judge him for standing by and letting others suffer, that would be forcing an expectation on him that we can't fulfill

ourselves. Kira's final interrogation, as she gently, mercifully breaks down Marritza's defenses, is a beautiful scene, and, for a few moments, there seems a possibility that the tragedy the two of them share might have an ending after all. Atrocities can, and will, occur, but it might be possible to find a way beyond them, to a world where such things might not happen again. Kira forgives Marritza for being imperfect. For being weak, and frightened, and alone. If she can do that, if she can feel compassion even under the weight of all she's seen, maybe...

Oh wait. A Bajoran just murdered Marritza for being a Cardassian. Never mind, then.

Stray observations:

- "Duet"'s only serious flaw is the ending. It manages to be both overly telegraphed ("Huh, I wonder why we keep seeing that pissed-off drunk guy?") and completely out of left field. I understand wanting to shock the audience, and it's possible to imagine this being effective, but it's just a shade too bleak and manipulative. Thankfully the rest of the hour was so good, those last three minutes don't matter.

Next week: Apologies for the off-format review, but I thought "Duet" deserved it's own space. Next week, we'll look at "In The Hands Of The Prophet," and I'll conjure up some general thoughts about the first season of *DS9*.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “In The Hands Of The Prophets”[Zack Handlen](#)[3/29/12 10:00AM](#)**“In The Hands Of The Prophets” (season 1, episode 20; originally aired 6/20/1993)***In which Louise Fletcher is not to be trifled with*

Teaching is a political act. It shouldn't be; conveying knowledge ought to be something so clearly positive and noble that we accept its value without question. But it gets complicated when you have to pinpoint what exactly all this “knowledge” is, and what should be taught in schools and what should be left for parents. Here in the United States, ideological battles are fought over what's appropriate in the classroom, over who controls what children know—and we're all nominally the same species. On DS9, Keiko is teaching human and Bajoran kids, among others, and while the school is small, and Keiko has never expressed much in the way of a revolutionary edge, there are bound to be problems sooner or later. Bajor is a planet in crisis, and when people get confused or frightened, they cling to whatever gives them comfort. It's understandable that religion would fill this role, and in some ways, it's laudable; instead of wallowing in despair or lashing out, the Bajorans seek to ally themselves with higher powers, and work to revitalize their troubled race with purpose and compassion. Unfortunately, whenever a large group of individuals clings to an idea for support, some of those individuals are going to cling too tightly. There's no ideology on Earth or elsewhere that can make you a better person simply for embracing it, and those Bajorans with hate in their hearts aren't suddenly going to let go of hate because of the Prophets. And even those who are peaceful believers will struggle to defend their faith against outsiders. In this case, that means Keiko, and her lessons about the wormhole, which focus on science rather than faith.

“In The Hands Of The Prophets” isn’t the subtlest episode, but it does a good job expanding the show’s world, and playing off of undercurrents and themes which have been built in throughout *DS9*’s first season. Keiko’s school was first introduced in [“A Man Alone,”](#) and while it hasn’t come up in every episode since then, it’s been mentioned every few episodes, to the point where it’s become an accepted part of the station. This is one of the ways serialization works for TV shows; you create a potential plot point or character, you make the sure the audience never entirely forgets it, but you also keep it largely in reserve until you need it. The last major focus on the school came in [“The Nagus,”](#) which reminded us once again that, regardless of how easy it is for us to see the value of learning, not every culture agrees with those values. In “The Nagus,” Nog’s father, Rom, pulled him out of school to save face in front of his elders. In “Prophets,” a Bajoran religious leader arrives on the station to object to what Keiko’s teaching Bajoran children. Both objections are presented as philosophical differences—Keiko isn’t teaching the “right” information—but are driven by more complicated motives. Rom pulled Nog out of school to impress his elders; and Vedek Winn Adami (Louise Fletcher) is using the fervor she can create over an easy target to help her strike at a more dangerous foe.

Louise Fletcher has had something of an up-and-down career since winning an Oscar for her career-defining role as Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest*. Mostly down; she’s worked steadily, but few other roles have effectively captured her mixture of soft-spoken, unblinking authoritarianism. In *Cuckoo’s Nest*, she humanized a larger-than-life villain without minimizing or soft-pedaling her cruelty, and she does much the same here. Vedek Winn is the most unsettling of enemies, a true believer whose faith doesn’t prevent her from manipulation and deceit. In a way, her faith emboldens her to do more. Winn is one of a handful of Vedeks in line to become the next Kai, and the public support she rallies on the station by targeting Keiko’s school works as both a clear statement of the philosophy she’ll bring to the position of Kai, and a way to use that philosophy to make her ascension appear all but inevitable. She has another motive as well, but it’s all part and parcel of the episode’s largest concern: negotiating the continued challenges of a Bajoran-Federation relationship. As a closing note to the show’s first season, the episode looks to provide a modicum of closure—“Look how far we’ve come”—while still allowing for the difficulties to come. In this respect, the hour largely succeeds. It’s a blunt instrument, but at this point in the series’ run, bluntness still gets the job done.

While Keiko and Vedek Winn are waging their word war, Chief O’Brien has problems of his own. One of his tools, an EJ7, is missing, and while that doesn’t seem like much, an engineer never misplaces his tools. Worse, the EJ7 is specifically designed to access security systems, which means if it was taken, whoever took it might have been up to no good. The situation becomes more complicated when O’Brien and his assistant Neela find a lump of organic material in a duct. The lump contains what’s left of the missing tool, along with the remains of one Ensign Aquino. It could’ve been an accident, but O’Brien isn’t buying that, and neither (presumably) is the audience. The structure is blatant, in that the two plots serve very distinct purposes: Winn and Keiko are there for the heavy stuff, with lots of uncomfortable tension and thematic weight, while O’Brien And The Missing Thingamabob provide a lighter tone. Yes, horrible death is involved, but a murder mystery has an inherent hook that’s easier

to grab on to than interracial religious and political strife. With the former, we can expect an answer to question; with the latter, the most we can usually expect is more questions. The two plots complement each other nicely, and O'Brien's story gains suspense from its adjacency to the vedek's. It's not explicitly stated, and the connection between the two doesn't become obvious until the last act, but it clearly isn't a coincidence when someone dies right before tensions between the Bajorans and the Federation personnel erupt. Not only are we curious who murdered poor Aquino, we're curious why, and we know it'll be important.

This keeps the episode moving, which is a good thing, because the other storyline doesn't have the same momentum. This isn't a criticism: The brief war over the school isn't really a war. Winn interrupts a class, and spreads distrust throughout the station; Keiko objects, there are some conversations; the school blows up; another vedek arrives on the station; and that's when the two separate stories become one, as we realize the murder is part of a small conspiracy for Winn to take out her biggest opponent for the position of Kai. The arguments and discussions that occur before this are, if sometimes a little too easily split between "good" and "bad," compelling and effective television, but unlike O'Brien's quest, none of these scenes really go anywhere. They can't. The biggest dramatic moment in the episode is Sisko's speech on the promenade about how much Bajorans and the Federation have come to respect each other, and he isn't changing anything so much as he's reminding everyone of the real status quo. Vedeks will come and go, and it's naïve to expect life will always (or even generally) be easy on the station, but one rabble rouser is never going to undo all the work that's been done. For all its pyrotechnics, this is a story about people taking stock of how far they've come, and how far they still have yet to go.

Winn is a terrific villain, though—maybe a little too terrific. For most of "Prophets," the vedek's arrogance and unflappability are both infuriating and utterly on point. People like Winn exist in the real world, which is frustrating; worse, they tend to rise to positions of power, because their determination, patience, and utter faith in their own infallibility give them a distinct advantage over everyone who pauses to think they might not be perfect. But by the end of the episode, we learn Winn has resorted to plotting assassination attempts to get her way, and there's something unfortunately convenient about it. While it's not hard to believe that Winn is so convinced of her superiority that she'd assume another vedek's rise to the Kai position would be disastrous for Bajor, and would thus use any means necessary to remove her rivals from the field, making Winn an outright criminal gives us a pass to dislike her. The issues she raises are troubling, as they should be, but as Sisko explains to Jake, we can't just dismiss people like Winn as "stupid," no matter how good that makes us feel. The cost of wanting to do the right thing is realizing you can always be wrong. Giving the audience and characters such an easy out with Winn—it's not a matter of philosophical differences, she's a killer—reduces the complexity.

Still, Winn is a great character, and I hope to see her again next season, no matter how unpleasant her visits might be. Besides, even if the murder plot is too broad, the character work is strong. We first met Neela (Robin Christopher) in "[Duet](#)," and while she's too new for her betrayal to carry a huge amount of weight, Christopher manages in a few short scenes to leave an impression. In particular, her

mildly flirtatious chat with O'Brien while the two are (unbeknownst to him) investigating her crime gives us a sense that she isn't just an unthinking acolyte. She tells O'Brien she likes him because he isn't like other Federation personnel, and she talks in the awkward, sort of surprised way people tend to have when revealing a truth about themselves. This doesn't make her any less committed to Winn, and while she argues with the vedek when she realizes her escape route has been cut off, she doesn't hesitate when it comes time to try and assassinate Vedek Bareil (Philip Anglim). Even when she fails, she remains undaunted. If Winn allowed us to get out of the conflict too easily, Neela pulls us back in. She's kind, cute, and friendly, and she still fires her phaser. These are complicated emotions, and they can ruin lives.

If "Prophets" is essentially about the conflicts which arise between cultures even when everyone has the best of intentions, Sisko and Kira serve as the representative figures in those conflicts. Both have good scenes in this season finale. Sisko gets a speech, and he also gets to stop Neela from killing Bareil; for my money, his best scenes are the quieter moments, first between him and Jake, and then later with Kira. Avery Brooks has tremendous presence and a terrific voice, but I'm not sure "big speech" sequences really suit him. Or maybe it was just the speech itself. Either way, he remains a strong leader in an ensemble series which, unlike earlier *Trek* shows, doesn't have a single dominating presence. Nana Visitor is great as always, although she spends most of the episode in the background. Her initial faith in Vedek Winn is a new wrinkle in her character; Kira's faith has been established before, but it's troubling to see her so willingly embrace a fanatic, no matter how much she longs for certainty. But she recognizes her mistake by the end, and while Vedek Winn walks away free of charges, and poor Neela goes off to jail, the episode still finds room for some hope in its final moments, between the two characters who have the most reason to be at odds. Sisko and Kira are back on the same team, and we have a relationship which has developed from barely muted antagonism to mutual respect. Their problems haven't been solved, but they, along with rest of the cast, are prepared to face what happens next together, which is all you can really hope for.

Stray observations:

- I didn't talk much about Vedek Bareil. He's fine for what he is, and it's a nice touch that even though he's largely sympathetic to Sisko's concerns, he's still held back by politics. Back in my review of ["Emissary,"](#) I criticized the show's less-than-adept use of religion. I think it works much better here. Not because religion is shown in an unfavorable light, but because the drama that comes out of it is motivated by earthly concerns. I'd much rather deal with people squabbling over how to worship their gods than I would be dealing with the gods themselves, at least in fiction.
- Kira: "'Okay'? I've forgotten 'okay.' Seems like I haven't seen 'okay' in years."

The First Season: There isn't a whole lot to say that I haven't already said in my reviews, but my overall impression of *Deep Space Nine* so far is favorable. Better than favorable, actually. Covering the first season or two of [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#) could be a slog, but with this show, I find myself looking forward to watching each week's episodes, to the point where I sometimes have to stop

myself from jumping further. It's true that this isn't a great show yet, but it *is* a solid one, and, more importantly, the areas in which it's strongest are the ones most important for a series' success. By its first season finale—hell, by halfway into season one—*DS9* has the characters, and it has the world. Yes, Dax doesn't exactly pop, and Bashir is a gray area, but they work well enough that it's not unreasonable to expect them to develop further down the road. Even better, everyone else is clearly defined and brings something distinct to the table. And while the area around the space station which the show calls home is still iffy (I liked what little we saw of Bajor in "Prophets," but I have a hard time reconciling it with the Bajor of ["The Storyteller"](#)), the station itself already feels like a home.

There were dull stretches in these 19 episodes, a few missteps and a handful of crummy, campy scripts. I don't doubt we'll be seeing more of those in the second season. But this show has all the necessary equipment for great drama, and what's more, it's delivered on its potential at least twice so far, with "Duet" and ["Progress."](#) Unlike *TNG*, this isn't a wreck that needs to right itself. It's a promising debut that just needs to finish finding its voice.

Next week: We dive into the second season with "The Homecoming" and "The Circle."

SEASON TWO

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Homecoming”/“The Circle”**Zack Handlen**4/05/12 10:00AM**“The Homecoming” (season 2, episode 1; originally aired 9/26/1993)***In which Kira and O’Brien rescue a hero who longs to be forgotten*

There’s something comforting about “To Be Continued.” It’s a way of saying that the game isn’t over yet; nothing’s permanent, no decisions are final; no matter how bad it looks for the heroes, there will be another episode next week for everyone to come out okay. “To Be Continued” is exiting, too. It usually comes right after a cliffhanger, and even if most cliffhangers are more satisfying in the set-up than in the resolution, they’re still a lot of fun. Plus, a two (or in this case, three) part storyline is a break from the norm. It’s special, and it carries a certain weight, no matter how silly it might be in execution. But there’s something frustrating about this as well. When I was a kid, they used to show *Batman* reruns on Sundays, which was great. Even better, they aired two in a row. Since every *Batman* was part of a two-parter, it should’ve been a perfect fit, except the local affiliate which showed the reruns didn’t really give a crap, and the episodes never aired in sequence. So every Sunday, I’d see *Batman* escape from death traps and wander into other death traps, without any continuity between the two. It was disconcerting. Nothing ever felt complete or fully resolved. I was always walking in on a story too early to see the end, or too late to know how it all got started.

These days, with internet streaming and DVRs, it’s a lot easier to watch things in order, which I find comforting. But there’s an essential incompleteness to a “To Be Continued” structure, one that pervades even when watching part two is as easy as clicking on the next entry in my Netflix queue. Of the two episodes we cover this week, “The Homecoming” comes the closest to being a full story in its own right. We’re given a clear plot hook, a goal, and, once that goal is accomplished, a decent exploration of the consequences. If it weren’t for the last scene, when Kira loses her job on the station

to the Bajoran resistance leader she rescued from a Cardassian labor camp, this wouldn't even need more than a single episode to play out. And in a way, that promise of continuation does this episode a disservice. Kira getting kicked out so early in the season is a surprise, and while it's reasonable to assume she'd be back eventually, keeping a certain ambiguity would've been a strong choice for the show. Instead, that "To Be Continued..." pops up, and we know she'll be back in a week or two. In its first season, *Deep Space Nine* embraced a loose serialization that worked fairly well, throwing out occasionally information but never straining too hard to make sure every episode was directly connected to what came before. At the start of the second season, they're taking the more direct approach, for good and for ill.

"The Homecoming" doesn't waste any time catching up. The cold open has Quark and Odo squabbling; Quark gets an earring from an alien hottie who wants him to deliver the item to Bajor; then Quark gives the earring to Kira (without asking for anything in exchange, which has to violate half a dozen Rules of Acquisition), and we're off to the races. Once again, Kira is confronted by some evidence of her past, in this case, proof of life of a resistance leader named Li Nalas (Richard Beymer, the *West Side Story* and [Twin Peaks](#) alum who isn't Russ Tamblyn). But while Kira is important to the episode (and even more important to the middle entry of this three-parter), this isn't really about her struggling to come to terms with the difference between the Bajor that was and the Bajor that is. This is more about Sisko struggling with the conflicts which came to light at the end of the last season. The Bajor that is, is a mess. Many Bajorans still struggle against the Federation presence, and while this is foolish on their part, it makes a certain kind of sense. This is a people who've spent decades under the cruel oppression of an outside force. It stands to reason they're going to be suspicious of any new force that takes the oppressor's place, regardless of the fact that the Federation is non-interfering and the only thing keeping the Cardassians at bay.

To represent the part of the population that wants Sisko and the others gone, we have the Alliance For Global Unity, otherwise known as the Circle. The Circle doesn't make an official appearance until part two, but they make their presence known early on when O'Brien finds the group's symbol spray painted on a wall in the station. It's a smart way to let the audience know that despite the general warm fuzziness at the end of "Prophets," Sisko's job remains as complicated as ever. This even creeps into his personal life; Jake scores a date with a Bajoran girl, only to have her cancel when her father decides he doesn't want his daughter making time with Federation folks. This is all fairly heavy-handed, but it's effective. Again, we see the difference between *DS9* and a show like [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#). On *TNG*, Picard would've given a speech (much like Sisko did), and then the *Enterprise* would have left, leaving us to assume that everything worked out okay after that for whatever planet of the week had gotten into trouble. Everyone on *DS9*, no one gets to just walk away. It's a terrific metaphor for the difference between a standalone show and a serialized one. The former has the advantage of freedom and variety; the latter benefits from the sense that every action reverberates, and that no answer is ever going to be as simple as we'd like it to be. (As Doc Manhattan once said, "Nothing ever ends.")

All of this is mostly background information in “The Homecoming.” The story here is focused on Nalas. Kira and O’Brien spearhead the rescue mission, and while it doesn’t take up a whole lot of time, it’s good TV. I don’t think Kira and O’Brien have spent much time together before, and they play off each other well, largely because of O’Brien’s level-headed refusal to be much upset about anything. With Sisko’s approval, they take a runabout to Cardassia Four and attempt what can charitably be described as a low-fi guerrilla assault, if you can call something with a space-ship and laser guns “low-fi.” Kira pretends she’s a prostitute and O’Brien is her pimp, which is fun (and I hadn’t realized how skinny Nana Visitor was), but the most important part to take away from this sequence is how devoted everyone is to Nalas. One of his fellow prisoners is responsible for smuggling Nalas’s earring off planet, in hopes someone would see it and recognize it; that same prisoner, along with several others, volunteers to give his life to buy time for Nalas to escape. We’ve already heard Kira wax rhapsodic over Nalas’s importance, but now we’ve seen the effect he has on other people first hand.

It’s an effect that Sisko hopes he can use to help strengthen the provisional government, and ease tensions between the Federation and Bajor. Except Li doesn’t act all that eager to jump into a position of command. He appears more tired than anything else, and while it’s not hard to understand why (labor camps don’t look like fun places to hang out), it’s hard to reconcile this man with the fervent devotion his words have inspired. He’s not a bad public speaker, he has a level of gravitas and sincerity, and yet he lacks Kira’s passion, or any apparent desire to re-invest himself in planetary politics. It’s tempting to think his spirit has been broken, but as we learn in a late episode scene between Li and Sisko, it’s more complicated than that. He never really had a spirit to begin with. He got the role of Supreme Rebel Bad-Ass almost entirely by accident, and now that he’s back, he wants nothing to do with authority or leadership or inspiration.

Li’s speech about shooting a Cardassian in his underwear is effective, and Beymer delivers it well. It’s curiously unsurprising to find that yet another one of Kira’s heroes has feet of clay, and while I can understand the idea—the rebellion needed symbols as much, if not more, than it needed actual brilliant leadership—it’s a little too thematically neat all the same. It makes the Bajorans look a bit like the idiots in *Life Of Brian*, so desperate for a messiah they’ll latch onto anyone, and while I appreciate the cynicism of that, it would’ve been nice if Nalas had been a little more competent. Then again, he doesn’t make any major mistakes between this episode and next, so it could be he’s trying to dodge responsibility by exaggerating his pointlessness; maybe all a leader needs to be really great is some patience, and the ability to say “Yes” to the right people.

“The Homecoming” is solid, if unspectacular. The performances are good, and the episode never feels overly padded, in the way that multi-part Trek episodes so often do. If I had a complaint, it’s that *DS9* has proven itself capable of greater complexity last season, and this episode, while rife with difficult situations, never really puts us in the position of having to make difficult choices. The Circle is obviously bad news, and while they aren’t an easy threat to shrug off, there’s no question that Sisko and the others won’t find some way of dealing with them, a way that won’t cost them much in the way of sleepless nights. There’s good drama in this episode, and the sudden appearance of Frank Langella in the last ten minutes, playing the presumably (future self: definitely) malevolent Minister

Jaro, is a welcome and completely unexpected surprise. But there's something missing, some final push of energy to go from "decent" to "Holy #\$^." I think it's connected with that "To Be Continued." At the end of the hour, Kira has been replaced by Nalas, and while Li doesn't appear to be up to anything, Jaro, clearly, has designs. But in case anyone was going to get uncomfortable or nervous or tense, the show reassures us, all of this will be resolved shortly. The eels do not eat the princess at this time.

Stray observations:

- I'd say the episode's biggest out and out misstep is the group of Circle members who attack Quark and brand his forehead. It's a creepy scene to be sure, but it doesn't make much tactical sense (why put the pressure on him, of all people?).

"The Circle" (season 2, episode 2; originally aired 10/3/1993)

In which Kira has visions, and Frank Langella is not to be trusted

Did we ever have a scene of gloating villains on *TNG*? We must have, surely, but I can't remember anything quite as striking as the conversation between Jaro and Vedek Winn which comes near the end of this episode. It's not a terrific scene, exactly; seeing Louise Fletcher and Langella work with each other is a lot of fun, but the slow, stolid tone which haunts much of the rest of the episode holds them back here, as they renew their terrible, potentially Bajor-destroying alliance. But it's definitely striking, because it offers something this multi-part epic had been lacking: a glimpse into the villains' heads, to give us some sort of context in which they aren't actually the bad guys. For all their ambitions and striving, I'm not sure Jaro or Winn really consider themselves to be evil, and it's important to get a sense of their plotting beyond the danger they pose to our heroes. And yet, while both actors fill their lines with unspoken nuance and insinuation (these two had to've been screwing at some point, right?), I came away from the conversation not knowing much more than I'd suspected going in.

Worse, it's still difficult to justify either character's behavior in terms of actual consequences. Winn wants to be Kai, and Jaro wants to rule all, and to accomplish this, both believe they need to get rid of the Federation presence on Bajor. That's all well and good, but without the Federation around, the Cardassians will come back, and we never get the sense that either Winn or Jaro is planning for that eventuality. It makes them look shortsighted and stupid, and while bad guys don't need to be super geniuses, it's hard to believe either of these characters—whose villainy is so clearly based on their talent for manipulation and plotting—would be so blinded by their arrogance. This alone doesn't kill the episode, and on the whole "The Circle" isn't bad; it's a step down from "The Homecoming," in that it lacks a certain cohesion, but it builds up a good head of steam, and the ending makes much better cliffhanger than last episode's minor concern over Kira's job placement. But like the previous episode, there are a lot of shortcuts which undermine the story's potential for ambiguity.

There are revelations aplenty in “The Circle,” and each one serves to simplify the crisis which threatens to overtake Bajor and the station. Odo, determined to figure out who’s selling weapons to the Circle, deputizes Quark on the assumption that he can get information which Odo doesn’t have access to. And he’s right; Quark quickly determines the Circle is buying weapons from Kressari traders, but when O’Brien searches the Kressari ship, he doesn’t find anything out of the ordinary or weaponish on board. Odo does his shape-shifting trick and stows-away after the Kressari leave the station, and learns that they’re buying material from the Cardassians to sell to the Bajoran revolutionaries. This isn’t unbelievable. Assuming the Cardassians still want possession of Bajor (nose-ridge fetishists?), they can’t very well openly make war against the Federation, but they can secretly encourage political strife which will force the Federation to leave. But it’s a disappointing twist, because it simplifies the conflict. The Circle has to be stopped, not just because they’re dangerous zealots, but because they’re the tools of the really, really bad guys. There’s no moral gray area here. Bajor has to be saved from itself.

As if that wasn’t bad enough, Jaro is the one behind the Circle, a power-hungry politician bent on manipulating an insecure populace to his own ends. This isn’t a new character type, and while it certainly isn’t an inherently awful one, it once again serves to draw obvious lines in the sand between the “good guys” and the “bad guys,” and it does so in the least interesting way possible. We even discover Jaro’s treachery via a damsel-in-distress sequence, when Kira is kidnapped from the monastery and brought to the bad guy’s secret underground lair. Jaro gets a gloating speech. Langella makes it work, because Langella doesn’t gloat so much as purr, but it’s disappointing to watch a difficult situation shake out into easy-to-follow solutions. Jaro must be defeated, and the Bajorans need to know that the Circle was supplied by Cardassians in an attempt to undermine their newfound freedom. While the immediate threat is certainly daunting, there’s none of the psychological profundity which the show gave us glimpses of last season. I’m sure Sisko will have to stay up long hours to win this one, but I doubt he’ll be losing any sleep over it.

While “The Circle” is disappointingly clear-cut, it’s not a failure of an episode by any means. As I said, I don’t think it’s quite as well-constructed as “The Homecoming,” but since it serves as the mid-point of a trilogy, that’s to be expected. Kira’s kidnapping is a goofy piece of unnecessary padding (Jaro wants her to tell him what Sisko will do after he takes control of Bajor; surely there are others he might have asked?), but up until then, her storyline had been intriguing, as she tried to find a role for herself off of *DS9*. There’s a fun scene early in the episode in which every major character on the show except Sisko comes by Kira’s apartments while she’s packing, and demands to know why she’s leaving without a fight. It’s frantic, and too aggressively silly at times, but it does give us a satisfying sense of how close all of these people are. One of the key signs of a strong ensemble is when a scene like this—one which relies on the assumption that the camaraderie is believable—plays without feeling forced, and the affection between Kira and the others here comes off as natural and charming. I’m less charmed by the sudden development of a potential relationship between Kira and Vedek Bareil, largely because Bareil has all the screen presence of a petrified tree stump. I’m not sure if he’s trying to seduce her or lead her to a higher path when he gives her a chance to view her destiny through an Orb, but

whatever his reasons, zzzzzzzzz. Kira's Orb vision was as weirdly suggestive and non-committal as prophetic fantasy sequences always are, and I appreciate how everything we saw (up to and including the nakedness) could either have been a suggestion of things to come, or simply commentary on the issues Kira was already dealing with. Either way, it made Kira's next scene with Bareil very awkward, and I'm sure she was glad for any excuse to get away, even if it was a kidnapping.

While the episode is mostly about setting up all the pins to get knocked down next week, it never turned into a chore, which I appreciate. I wouldn't rank either of these hours as highpoints of my *DS9* viewing so far, but they work on the fundamental level that stories like this absolutely have to work: I want to know what happens next. And even though I'm disappointed that the conflict became as straightforward as it did, I have to hand to "The Circle" for giving as a cliffhanger which sets up precisely the right sort of expectations. After rescuing Kira from Jaro's clutches, Sisko learns that his hands in the matter of the Circle vs. Bajor are officially tied. It's another Prime Directive issue: despite the Cardassian involvement, the Federation can't take a direct hand in resolving a civil dispute. A group of Bajoran assault ships are headed to Deep Space Nine to take command, and Sisko has resolved to stall as long as he can, in the hopes that he and the others can come up with some kind of solution that will keep them on the station, and Bajor out of Cardassian hands. It's a dangerous situation, but the danger is immediate and clear, and while the odds are against them, they aren't impossible. I hope the show expands its ambitions down the road, but for right now, I'm looking forward to a good fight.

Stray observations:

- Li Nalas is hanging around this episode, fitting in well. It's a credit to the episode that he doesn't turn out to be a traitor or secretly working with Jaro. I put the odds on him heroically sacrificing himself next week at five to one.
- I love how inept Kira is at relaxing.

Next week: We finish this three-parter with "The Siege," and remember Dax is on this show with "Invasive Procedures."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Siege”/“Invasive Procedures”[Zack Handlen](#)[4/12/12 10:00AM](#)**“The Siege” (season 2, episode 3; originally aired 10/10/1993)***In which Sisko gets his Die Hard on*

Let’s get this out of the way first: this ends way too easily. After three episodes of buildup to conflict, after Jaro and Winn’s stratagems, after the Cardassian villainy and guerrilla warfare on the station, all Sisko and his team need to save the day is a ship’s manifest. Kira gets it to the ministers, and with barely an objection, Jaro slinks away, and Winn goes with the flow. It’s abrupt, right up to the oh-so-convenient death of Li Nalas. (Which I totally called, in case you forgot.) This is one of the main difficulties of multi-part stories. You’ve got to shake up the status quo enough to justify the format, while at the same time finding some way to make sure everything gets back to roughly the way it started. That’s a tall order, and the ending is the trickiest part. The details of this particular ending make sense, like Winn’s sudden-but-inevitable-betrayal of Jaro once the wind turns, but it’s something of an anticlimax after all that buildup.

Really, though, the only reason this is noticeable is that the build-up of “The Siege” is pretty damn awesome. I know enough about future seasons of *Deep Space Nine* to know that the shit is going to get real somewhere down the line, and viewed as a preview of coming attractions, this episode hits all the right notes to convince me of the show’s ability to convey a wide-scale conflict. There’s a terrific sense running through most of the hour of events escalating out of control, partly because of Jaro and Winn’s manipulations, but also because past a certain point, that’s just what events do. There are a few too many smirking villains here for the conflict to be morally complex, but that doesn’t change the

fact that this is an empty battle, driven by a corrupt, power-hungry few who use empty patriotism to achieve their own ends. It's not good guys versus bad guys. It's good guys versus a few bad guys and a lot of confused guys, and that takes all the fun out of shooting people with a laser gun.

Well, some of the fun. The conclusion to *DS9*'s first three-parter is taken up by two main storylines: Sisko and his team's combined effort to disrupt and throw off a Bajoran-led occupation of the station, and Dax and Kira's rush to get the proof of Cardassian involvement to the Bajoran ministers. After the long buildup of ["The Circle,"](#) this is mostly action, and rousing stuff at that; whatever reservations I have about the very end, there's no denying that the show does its level best to deliver on the promise of parts one and two, and I can appreciate the effort, even if I don't always love the results. This is like a series making the first fumbling moves toward self-definition, and it's all the more remarkable because it's heading in a new direction for the *Star Trek* franchise. There is a complex political situation which, easy ending or no, won't be going away any time soon. These are villains who are powered, in part, by the social unrest which they encourage but did not themselves create.

When we left last week, Bajoran warships were headed to Deep Space Nine to oust the remaining Federation personnel. Sisko has decided to stay, and gives a speech explaining to his crew what "staying" means: it's dangerous, with an uncertain outcome, and there's no chance of any Starfleet backup arriving in the nick of time. A small group of fighters remains on the station, while everyone else evacuates (and Quark takes advantages of the chaos to try and make some money), and it's a sign in this episode's favor that this sequence works, even though we know the evacuation is only temporary. The whole thing may run a little longer than it needs to, and I'm not sure I really needed another fight between Keiko and O'Brien, but all of the drama over departure works to sell the fact that, whatever those of us in the audience know about the restrictions of episodic television (and those damnable "To Be Continued..." tags), the crisis is very real for the people stuck inside it. This raises the stakes for the story, and also drives home the unsettling, awful quickness with which events can go awry. Two episodes ago, the Circle was just a group of creeps spray-painting slogans. Now they've taken over the government, and supposedly reasonable men are making threats.

This is something that [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#) never quite managed to sell. It could give us planets at war, and it could make heavy-handed proclamations about the horrors of conflict, but I can't think of an episode that demonstrated as well as this three-parter does the surreal speed with which aggressive debate can lead to outright hostilities. It's not perfect; while this episode does find Kira standing on the floor of the Bajoran government while ministers rage around her, it never really justifies her vision from "The Circle." (I've already gone into my reservations about the out-and-out villainy of Jaro and Winn.) Plus, while there's tension and decently high stakes, this is all still comparatively safe. Li Nalas dies, but he's a guest star, and he had death written on his face from the first time we saw him. And it's not even death that's a problem, not really. The reason I criticized the "To Be Continued..." in last week's review is because it's a clue from the show's writers to reassure us that our view of the show, and of the show's world, isn't going to be seriously questioned. This is hand-holding, and that hand-holding pervades this episode. It's a mark of how high in my estimation *DS9* has already risen that I'm entertained but mildly disappointed with a storyline like this one.

Sisko, O'Brien, Bashir, Odo, and a very reluctant Quark stay on the station to fight back against General Krim (Stephen Macht, who we first met in "The Circle") and his men. This conflict is arguably unnecessary. Kira and Dax have split off from the others with their crucial cargo manifest, and the conflict on Bajor between the Circle and sanity is only resolved after Kira brings the manifest in front of the council. Nothing that Sisko or the others do has much impact on Kira's mission, but the guerrilla combat on DS9 is enjoyable enough that it's hard to object. There's a lot of running around and artful sabotage, and Odo proves once again he's a good shapeshifter to have in a fight. Hell, Sisko's team even manages to get right up close to the general himself before the battle comes to a conclusion. Having everyone crawling around the ducts and choking down O'Brien's beloved combat rations helps create the illusion of danger, and the fact that this comes as the climax of a multi-episode arc gives it more weight than a regular standalone. Boil it down to its essence, there's not a lot of change here, but it certainly feels epic in its best moments, and that's something.

What else? Well, Kira and Dax make a great team, with Kira's gung-ho enthusiasm bringing out a different, more distinctive side to Dax than we usually see. Steven Weber pops up for a guest turn as the venomous Colonel Day, making this maybe the most guest-star heavy run of episodes I've ever seen on a *Trek* show. And I suppose we should take a moment for Li Nalas's passing, although it's a death which inspires little in the way of real sorrow. While Nalas's rescue back in "The Homecoming" started this mess, he's never been a huge presence on the show; this fit his character, and, in those few moments when he did take center stage, gave him a certain tired gravity. But it also has the unfortunate effect of rendering his demise perfunctory, like the death of a celebrity you thought had been gone for years. Kira's sorrow over his passing is convincing, and I love Sisko and O'Brien's chat about the importance of remembering Nalas in the right way. It's just—he gets taken out by a phaser blast after the battle is basically over. That's not very deft storytelling, which basically sums up whatever issues I have with this odd little trilogy: an unfortunate lack of deftness. Thankfully, with its demonstrable willingness to explore Bajoran politics and challenge our heroes on their home turf, this episode demonstrates a heartening desire to improve.

Stray observations:

- Odo can turn himself into a tripwire. I'm torn between thinking that's awesome, and wondering if it hurts when someone trips over him.
- Kira and Dax's flight in the Barjoan resistance ship is one of the best examples of convincing flight combat I've seen on TV, pre-[Battlestar Galactica](#).
- Bareil and Kira hug. Sigh. I think I know where this is going, and... sigh.

"Invasive Procedures" (season 2, episode 4; originally aired 10/17/1993)

In which Dax goes under the knife

Shows will often repeat structures—that's what procedurals are all about, really—but the connection between the first-season episode ["Dax"](#) and this one is more than just a matter of structure. Once

again, everyone's favorite Trill nominally takes center stage, for reasons which are based entirely on the symbiont inside her chest, and once again, Dax spends a large part of the episode sidelined from the main action, reduced to a McGuffin whose only purpose is to inspire her fellow castmates to make passionate, tearful speeches on her behalf. Once again, we're given a fascinating glimpse into what it means to be a Trill, and the moral and ethical complexities raised by the relationship between host and slug-thing—and once again, this glimpse renders Dax herself frustratingly opaque. We learned more about her in her few scenes with Kira last episode than we do here. This is a better episode than "Dax," with a better story hook and a pair of good guest stars, but it's curious how the show keeps ostensibly trying to deepen Dax's character, while only serving to make her more and more obscure. Terry Farrell has demonstrated herself entirely capable of being charming and funny and likeable when the script gives her the means to do so, so why all the obfuscation?

Putting that to one side for the moment, "Invasive Procedures" works well enough as a standalone, succeeding largely on the shoulders of John Glover. Glover, a character actor who you may recognize from his turn as Daniel Clamp in [Gremlins 2: The New Batch](#) (he also made a terrific Devil on the short-lived Fox series *Brimstone*), plays Verad, a Trill who spent a good part of his life studying and training to be a symbiont host. He failed to pass the selection process, however, and it has made him bitter and determined to get what he considers rightfully his. I'm not sure if this is the first time we've heard that not every Trill gets a symbiont; I think Dax may have brought it up before, but it's definitely the first time we've seen that knowledge from the other side. Verad makes an excellent villain, someone driven by a need we can relate to (I doubt most of us want a stomach slug, but it's not hard to empathize with loss and shame and a fear of mediocrity) while still being willing to do whatever it takes to see that need is satisfied. We see two versions of Verad over the course of the episode, and Glover does a fine job selling both. When he arrives on the station, the Trill is nervous, shy, and awkward, but once he gets Dax inside him (wow, that doesn't sound filthy at all), he's confident and self-assured. The clear distinction between Verad and Verad Dax helps make the character even more sympathetic. He's willing to let Jadzia die to get what he wants, but given how much happier and stronger he appears when he succeeds, it's easy to see where he's coming from.

That's another reason why this episode works better than it might have, by the way—the fact that Verad does, at least for a little while, get what he wants. And fairly quickly, too. It takes some time to set up the circumstances: The station is in the grip of a plasma storm, so all non-essential personnel have temporary disembarked. A ship approaches, docks, and then a pair of Klingons take control, making sure to force Odo into a stasis box which renders him harmless. It's a smart move, and one that seems obvious in retrospect; at the time, though, it made me realize that Odo is basically the Data of this show in more ways than one. (One of the big headaches on *TNG* was dealing with Data every time a new threat appeared on board the *Enterprise*.) With only a skeleton crew to offer resistance, the Klingons, Verad, and an ex-prostitute named Mareel (Megan Gallagher) take over almost immediately. Verad explains what he wants, and Dax, realizing it's her life or her friends', gives in. Bashir protests, but he's not given many options, and a few minutes later, we're in the infirmary, and the stomach slug is exchanged.

Obviously there's no serious threat that Jadzia will die, or that she'll lose the Dax symbiont forever, but it is a great way to both make the danger more immediate, and give the second half of the episode a new spin. Once Verad and Dax are joined, Verad's behavior shifts (as described above), but he doesn't suddenly change his mind about wanting the symbiont, nor does he become more concerned about Jadzia's well-being. Meanwhile, the Dax-less Jadzia is frightened and unwell. "Invasive Procedures" might have been stronger if it had spent more time with Jadzia after the surgery. As fascinating as it is to see what effect the joining has on Verad, he's a one-shot guest star. Jadzia Dax, on the other hand, is with us for the duration, and she deserves more than a tearful line to Bashir before letting everyone else do all the heavy lifting.

I'm not sure what to make of Quark in this one. His willingness to override the security measures of the station for outsiders puts him firmly back in the villain camp, but his dismay at the rage this inspires in the rest of the crew drives him to actually act like a hero for once. Maybe the problem is that Armin Shimerman is so good at his job that I keep expecting Quark to be smarter than this, but even taking that into account, this is really, really stupid. Being greedy is one thing, but doing something that could theoretically get him thrown off the station as well as getting others killed, is just bad business. I can accept that he doesn't know what Verad is planning, but "overriding security" isn't something you do casually (especially when it can be so easily traced back to you). It stretches credibility that he could engage in this kind of behavior on regular basis and still work on the station. Still, the fact that he tackles a Klingon and gets Odo out of the box speaks to his credit, so I'd say this is largely a wash.

Another point of comparison between this and "Dax": "Invasive Procedures" has some great Sisko moments, as he first tries to defend his friend's life, then forces Mareel to face some hard truths. He gets a chance to take out a Klingon himself, and fares a lot better than Quark (this fight scene is great, as Sisko is absolutely ruthless). Best of all, he proves just how far he's willing to go when Verad Dax tries to pull the old, "You won't shoot me, Benjamin," trick. "Don't call me Benjamin," Sisko snarls, and fires, risk to the symbiont be damned.

This isn't the show's finest hour. The conceit of emptying out the station for a "plasma storm" is goofy, especially coming so soon after the emotional evacuation of "The Siege," and most of the drama rests too heavily on the shoulders of the guest star. Glover is more than up to the task, but his presence reduces everyone else to the position of reacting to his drama, as opposed to being the centers of their own. But the episode is better than "Dax" by far. It's tighter, and less driven by back-story. The premise may not be the best, but the execution is solid, and it's great to see Sisko kick some ass. And guest star or no, Verad is a tragedy, a man so tormented by a loss of purpose that he loses everything else. In the end, Jadzia and Dax are rejoined, and she's back to her old self—but she's sadder. Verad is a part of her now, and always will be; she understands him. It's too bad he couldn't feel the same.

Stray observations:

- What race is Mareel? All those forehead bumps blur together after a while.

- For such a complicated surgery, there is surprisingly little blood in the transplant of the symbiont.

Next week: We deal with some “Cardassians” and meet up with “Melora.”

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Cardassians”/“Melora”[Zack Handlen](#)[4/19/12 10:00AM](#)**“Cardassians” (season 2, episode 5; originally aired 10/24/1993)***In which you can go home again, but you really don’t want to*

We’ve seen how the Cardassian withdrawal affected Bajoran politics, leaving ambitious Bajorans the necessary chaos to achieve their ends, while the leaders of the revolution floundered in the absence of a clear enemy. But while Kira has explained the horrors of the occupation effectively enough, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* hasn’t given us a sense of what the new world order means to the average citizen of Bajor. This isn’t a flaw; *DS9* isn’t a sociological survey. But it is a possible source for new stories, given the show’s willingness to present the reconstruction of Bajor in a positive-but-still-cynical light. “Cardassians” doesn’t spend a lot of time on the planet, but it does introduce a subject we haven’t dealt with before: the Cardassians left behind in the chaos of the retreat. Specifically, the Cardassian children. On a world where their kind is known primarily as merciless aggressors, these orphans are the victims of forces beyond their control, doomed to a lifetime of apologizing for actions they had no hand in. They’re statistical oddities, points on a graph that don’t fit a standard arc, which makes them excellent fodder for drama.

“Cardassians” delves into this to an extent, and for a while, the episode seems to be about the challenges facing the orphans in the reconstruction. But then the whole thing turns out to be about something else entirely. I’m not sure if there’s a term for this, but it’s something I’ve seen on plenty of genre shows, stories that start off dealing with complex, difficult situations before everything gets simplified into a clear-cut case of “Bad guy messed us up.” That’s not exactly what happens here, as

Gul Dukat's duplicity doesn't erase the stricken expressions Bashir sees on Cardassian orphans while visiting Bajor; nor does it take away from the fact that Rugal, a Cardassian boy raised by Bajoran parents, is forced to leave the people he knows and loves and return to Cardassia with his biological father. But it softens the blow in a way that undercuts the impact of these facts. The brief courtroom scene at the episode's climax treats Bashir's revelations about Dukat as if they were some kind of shocking truth, but these revelations are essentially meaningless in the context of what had, up until then, been the story's main focus. The issue was, does Rugal belong back at home with his own kind, or should he stay with his Bajoran parents? Dukat's trickery doesn't enter into it. Hell, if anything, finding out he was manipulating events behind the scenes makes it seem even more like Rugal should stay with his adoptive parents, given that this most likely means the accusations against those parents were part of Dukat's scheme.

I almost wonder if the ending was a compromise between what the series was aiming for, and what it could actually achieve. It's something that happens fairly often on television, especially on a show that isn't quite sure how dark it wants to get. *DS9* had demonstrated its willingness to go grim, but maybe destroying a child's life was a little harsher than anyone was comfortable with, and so we got the silliness about Dukat and his evil plan. It's not bad as evil plans go (it shows a remarkable amount of cunning, really), but, again, it doesn't change any of the issues here. It makes Kotan Pa'Dar look even more the victim, but his connection to Rugal was never in question, and the debate over the suitability of Bajoran parents for a Cardassian child never gets going. The episode goes so far as to give us the standard-issue *Trek* "hearing," but, as mentioned, the proceedings are short-circuited by Bashir and Garak's sudden appearance. By the time Rugal leaves with Pa'Dar, you have to work to remember all the angst that built to this moment. Rugal, who spends most of his screentime making his feelings about Cardassians very, very clear (he's not a fan), doesn't even seem all that upset about leaving. At the very least, he's resigned himself to whatever happens next, and while I completely accept this as a resolution, it feels like we missed a step, in seeing him go from hating his biological dad to being kind of okay with it. All the time we spend with Bashir and Garak, tracking down Rugal's adoption records and uncovering the secret plot, Rugal is going through drama back on the station—and it's hard not to feel short-changed.

I can't criticize the episode too harshly for this, though, because while Rugal is interesting in concept, he is (like so many television teenagers) pretty dull in practice; not that anyone would have an easy time competing with the grand return of Garak. Last time we saw our favorite Cardassian sonofabitch was back in the ["Past Prologue."](#) It's been too long, but thankfully, Garak hasn't lost any of his charm. Andrew Robinson is as sharp and sexually ambiguous as ever, and his presence helps elevate the Dukat storyline to a high enough level that its essential pointlessness loses a lot of its sting. Garak is a rarity in *Trek*, a character whose motives are never entirely clear; like Bashir, we're pretty sure he's on the "good" side, and his actions so far have upheld this, but he's just mysterious enough to make you wonder what else is going on behind those smiles.

Maybe "ambiguous" is the wrong word. Maybe it's more that Garak is someone with his own agency, and his own goals, and every so often he wanders into this silly little TV series and livens up our dreary

lives. We learn a few things about him we didn't know before—namely that he and Gul Dukat have a history—but if there's any substantial change between this episode and "Past Prologue," it's that Bashir is much more confident and direct. Generally speaking, this is a good episode for the doctor. He oversteps himself once or twice (and Sisko is hilariously terrifying each time), but his instincts are good, and it's nice to see him forcing the always slippery Garak to be more specific in his insinuations.

As for the rest of the hour, Rugal's brief time with the O'Briens is illuminating. For once, O'Brien manages to look less sympathetic than Keiko; the chief engineer makes a derogatory comment about letting Rugal play with their daughter, and Keiko shuts him right the hell down. Then O'Brien spends some time with the kid, and, eventually, time with Pa'Dar, and both scenes work well enough, although Rugal isn't all that compelling. (His situation is compelling, but as an individual, he's tedious.) Given the title of the episode and the presence of Gul Dukat lurking around the edges, it's surprising how little Kira is involved in all of this; I think we see her nodding at some point, and I'm sure she provides exposition, but she stays out of the main action. That leaves O'Brien to represent the "I hate Cardassians" faction, which he does with aplomb. Having him hear Rugal explain why he hates Cardassians and why he doesn't consider himself a Cardassian—despite having the standard issue corpse-skin and assortment of facial spines—makes for a great contrast.

That's as far as that particular drama goes, though. While "Cardassians" is entertaining, buoyed by Garak's charms, a thorny premise, and a mystery which only becomes hollow in retrospect, it entertains issues it has no serious interest in exploring, and that can't help but be disappointing. In the episode's defense, the Cardassian orphans aren't a problem that's easily solvable, and we're at least given an ending that isn't happy for everyone. But this feels incomplete, with too much focus put on the trees while the forest just stands there, staring, asking when it can go home again.

Stray observations:

- I like when Rugal whines, "I didn't do anything wrong," after he bites a dude in public. Of course, he probably doesn't think biting Garak is a crime since he believes all Cardassians deserve what they get. I can't imagine the psychological toll of loathing your own species. Not having some issues or concerns, but actively despising what you are to the point of claiming you're something else. It's reminiscent of the black Klu Klux Klan member in *Shock Corridor*, but while the episode raises the issue, it never does anything with it, preferring instead to focus on Bashir and Garak's detective story.
- Garak makes a point of saying how odd it is that a race as devoted to record-keeping and specificity as the Cardassians would leave so many children behind for no reason. This is one of the reasons he and Bashir work to uncover the secret behind Rugal's "adoption," but we do see other orphans on Bajor. Are they all pawns in some Cardassian official's power play, just waiting to be called into service?
- Sisko is so much fun when he plays authority figure: "Don't apologize. It's been the high point of my day. Don't do it again." (He also has terrific pajamas.)
- "I never tell the truth because I don't believe there is such a thing." —Garak, bein' awesome.

“Melora” (season 2, episode 6; originally aired 10/31/1993)

In which you can take the girl out the wheelchair but you can't take the oh now I hate myself.

Whatever reservations I have about “Cardassians,” it’s miles above the second half of this week’s double feature, a mediocre slog weighed down by an irritating guest star and some cheesy, grating romance. I’m not sure if I’d say this is the worst episode of *DS9* I’ve seen yet, but it’s easily in the bottom five and its biggest crime is that it’s annoying in a boring way. This has all the hallmarks of an original series [Star Trek](#) episode, without any of the camp or Leonard Nimoy to take the edge off; there’s a woman constantly picking fights with anyone she thinks is trying to hold her back, there’s a regular ensemble member having a supposedly deep relationship with someone we know we’ll never see again, and a guest star flirts with a major life choice in a way that makes it obvious she’ll never actually go through with it. It’s so “blah” I’d completely forgotten about it by the time I sat down to write this review, and I watched it two days ago. There’s a Quark subplot which is mildly amusing, and not every part of the main storyline is absolutely awful, but “Melora” is as disposable as they come.

The biggest problem is Melora (Daphne Ashbrook) herself. An Elaysian ensign working her way up the Starfleet ranks as fast as she possibly can, Melora comes from a planet with a very low gravity level, which means she needs special equipment and modifications to get by in a standard gravity environment. That raises a question (and you’ll pardon the digression, but there’s little about this hour to talk about otherwise): What constitutes “standard gravity” in this reality? I mean, I basically just made up that phrase for the sake of context, as it’s not something that’s ever really discussed at length in any of the *Trek* shows. The Federation spans far enough you’d think that this amount of differentiation would come up on a somewhat routine basis—and, it should be mentioned, Bashir handles the challenge without acting like it’s completely beyond his abilities. And yet he and O’Brien treat this as something new. (Also, one of Melora’s defining traits is her isolation). It’s always funny when a *Trek* show takes a scientific idea it normally ignores, like, say, different atmospheres, and highlights it for a single episode. In a way, it’s like how Melora is hugely important to Bashir for this hour, even though we’ll never hear about her again.

Sigh. I guess I should talk about Melora, then. I wasn’t much impressed. Characters with disabilities, when they’re presented poorly, tend to go one of two ways: Either they’re of the helpful, friendly, “it’s okay if you feel awkward around me, I’m here to teach you life lessons” variety that I’m sure popped up on a half-dozen episodes of *Full House*; or else they’re the angry, chip-on-the-shoulder type that picks fights to prove they can “take it.” Melora lands in the latter category, and as soon as she arrives on the station she’s poking at everyone around her, obsessed with taking umbrage at the slightest hint she’s not capable of performing her duties. This makes her hard to take right from the start, especially considering she’s a stranger to us, a stranger who introduces herself by yelling, for no justifiable reason, at characters we’ve come to care for. Later, the episode tries to soften Melora by first showing how her condition makes her vulnerable—she can fall and not get up—and then demonstrating how her struggles with adversity have driven her to remarkable achievements, like a talent for ordering

food at a Klingon diner we've never seen before. Oh, and Bashir is totally into her, and we like Bashir, so that obviously means we should give a hoot about whatever Melora's deal is.

I didn't, though. I'm not sure how much is the actress' fault and how much the writing; I suspect it's a combination of both, but as written, I'm not sure the part is really playable. There's a flaw that crops up whenever a writer tries to write about a character who has certain innate traits the writer can't, for whatever reason, empathize with; to compensate, that writer will focus on constantly drawing attention to those traits. Like, if a clueless male writer wants to create a woman, you can expect a lot of talk about physical features and menstrual cycles, since, obviously, being a woman means you think about your boobs and your period all the freakin' time. That's the concern with the two aforementioned modes for dealing with so-called disabilities. Yes, being stuck in a wheelchair because you don't have the muscles or skeletal structure to handle an environment with harsh gravity would be a big deal. But by making it the centerpiece of Melora's characterization, it ensures she barely exists at all. People don't tend to go around constantly remarking on aspects of their lives which have been with them for years. Melora is simply an expression of an idea, a symbol made irritating flesh, and, since she's the one supposed to do all the dramatic heavy lifting here, that gives the episode no place to go.

Like I said, Quark's plot is fun, although it exists largely so we can have a climax in which Melora uses her magical ability to navigate low-gravity to defeat a bad guy. At least the threat on Quark's life gives us a scene with Odo, who is sadly missing from most of the festivities this week. (Maybe he and Kira were off having a ["Zeppo"](#) moment.) The main story, however, never manages to get off the ground. Bashir sees through Melora's prickly surface nature (in a conversation which doesn't play as condescending at all, no sir), the two fall for each other, they float for a while in the low gravity of her apartment. Then he comes up with a "cure," and she immediately latches on to it, somehow never thinking to question if she really wants to do something to her body that would make it impossible for her to ever visit home again. After having her big moment on the runabout, she decides to forgo Bashir's miracle treatment, because the ability to float reasonably well is too damn important for her to lose.

Plot summary is the last recourse of the reviewing damned, but I can't even work up the energy to properly snark this. We did get some back-story from Bashir, which was unsurprising but well-delivered (he played tennis for a while because he watched a girl die), and, um, I mentioned Odo, right? Yeah, let's move on.

Stray observations:

- Quick, somebody who knows more about evolution than I do: Is it strange that Melora is still recognizable humanoid in shape, despite coming from a planet with gravity so low that it allows for floating? I'd assume she'd be thinner and more delicate; I would've enjoyed this episode a lot more if she'd been played by a Muppet.

Next week: We learn a few more “Rules Of Acquisition,” and try to decide what defines a “Necessary Evil.”

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Rules Of Acquisition”/“Necessary Evil”Zack Handlen4/26/12 10:00AM**“Rules of Acquisition” (season 2, episode 7: originally aired 11/7/1993)***In which Quark meets a Ferengi with a secret, in that she’s a lady*

So, Quark gets a rom-com this week, and it’s not awful. If anything on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* has really surprised me, it’s how much effort the show puts into redeeming the Ferengi as a race. I don’t mean in moral terms; in terms of goals and ethics they’re still just a few steps away from *Captain Planet* villains. (Just replace “greed” with “pollution,” throw in some cheap animation, and voilà.) But in the handful of Ferengi-centric episodes I’ve seen so far, there’s a definite, not-entirely-joking attempt to make the race more than a one-note caricature of unbridled avarice. It has a political system, it has a history, and, most fascinatingly of all, it has a cultural philosophy that specifically focuses on the acquisition of wealth as the primary, noblest societal goal. Very Ayn Randian, come to think, although none of the Ferengi seem particularly inclined to defend the purity of their beliefs. I doubt Grand Nagus Zek would blow up a building because someone dared compromise it; he’d just charge them a fee for excessive complication.

While this hasn’t made me thrilled to see a Ferengi episode come down the pike, it has prevented these occasional hours from being as horrible as some of [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#)’s worst offenses in the realm of comic relief. The less the Ferengi are caricatures and the more they’re allowed their own agency, however odd or narrow-minded that agency might be, the more fun they are to watch. And it’s worth noting that even though there’s been some satire at the expense of how the Ferengi do business, none of this has ever been presented as an attitude that needs some kind of

moral comeuppance. Zek (Wallace Shawn) makes his second appearance here, and as with the first, he has plans, the plans are a tad on the sleazy side, those plans come to fruition, and Zek himself isn't portrayed as a bad guy. Kind of a dick, sure, but not an out-and-out villain who must be stopped. The Ferengi stories have, in addition to world-building, served the arguably more important purpose of helping us to see Quark in context. It's a lot like what *TNG* did with Worf and the Klingons (which means I totally should have seen it coming): When compared to the rest of his people, Quark is actually pretty reasonable. So we netter understand why the Ferengi do what they do, and we like one of the show's main characters more. That's not a bad result, all things considered.

That said, don't mistake "Rules Of Acquisition" for a classic. It's good-natured and has its bright spots, but it also relies on some mediocre shtick, and, at its worst, gets too eager to make text out of its subtext—"The Ferengi aren't so bad!" There's a very small subplot in which Zek hits on Kira because she's a forceful woman in a uniform, and Kira is understandably weirded out by this, and Dax tells her the Ferengi are cool just 'cuz. Seriously, that's the conversation; Dax likes 'em because they're fun to be around, even though every time we see a group of more than two Ferengi, it's like watching 10-year-old boys hyped up on sugar while fighting over a girlie magazine. It's nice that the franchise realizes the Ferengi could use a little help in the likeability department, and it's not as though Kira ever appears threatened or inordinately put out by Zek. And hey, Zek's infatuation with her fits in with the other, more serious angle of the story: namely, the sad state of actual Ferengi women, who are forced to stay at home and be nude all the time. (Meaning it makes sense that Zek, and every other Ferengi male we've met, is super into strong, fully-clothed woman; they want what they themselves have forbidden.) But it's half-assed.

The main storyline is better, although it takes a while to get interesting. When Zek arrives on the station, he's got an assignment for Quark—running negotiations with the Dosi to get a certain number of barrels of Tulaberries. Quark is thrilled but nervous, and when his new waiter, Pel, offers to help, Quark agrees without much argument. Pel is very sharp, proving to be a valuable asset to Quark, but something is suspect about the newcomer. Ferengi don't tend to offer aid freely, which means that Pel has something planned. The twist? Pel is a she, who came to the station to make a name for herself under an assumed name, violating Ferengi gender laws as she did so. The reason she's so helpful to Quark is that she's fallen in love him.

This is a bit silly, like all one-off infatuations tend to be (which isn't to say she can't come back to the station, but she and Quark fall for each other in the space of a single hour, at least by my watch), and there are some gags which test your patience for, "Ha, it's funny because he thinks she's a man!" set-ups. But while the Tulaberry quest isn't exactly gripping, the fact that the Dosi women are just as much a part of the negotiations as the Dosi men is telling, and the whole thing picks up considerably when Pel finally comes clean. Well, okay, Rom's the one who finds out her secret and tells Quark, but Pel was definitely planning on telling him the truth. Quark is horrified, but he also cares about her, even to the point of sacrificing profit to protect her from being punished by Zek. There's the sense that Pel may be the start of some grand societal change; that the Ferengi women might finally rise up against the men who keep them nude behind closed doors, and I'm always a fan of that sort of thing.

The rising up, not the forced nudity. (Freely chosen nudity, on the other hand, is better than just about anything.)

Still, as nice as it is to see the winds of change begin to blow, what really works about this episode is Quark himself. Namely, the idea (which has been hinted at before) that Quark is just not that good at being a Ferengi. Sure, he's greedy, and sure, he lacks what we'd think of as scruples, and sure, he totally gets off on that ear thing. But he has a conscience, which must be a liability in the Ferengi lifestyle, and while he has certain prejudices when Pel admits who she is, he doesn't struggle that much when it comes time to stand up for her in front of the Grand Nagus. It reminds of me Worf again, but where Worf's commitment to Klingon ideals was used as a way to highlight the inherent rot of modern Klingon culture, Quark's inability to commit completely to the ideals of his own race demonstrate how much the Ferengi need to adapt. Sure, you can argue this is just another way for human morality to take precedence, but Quark's ability to change with the times, no matter how much he might want to resist the change, is actually a darn good trait for any species to have. So maybe it's not so much that Quark is bad at being a Ferengi; maybe it's just that he's bad at being at being a Ferengi right now. Who knows which he'll be tomorrow?

Stray observations:

- Brian Thompson played the male Dosi. He doesn't do much beyond being Brian Thompson in crazy makeup, but it works.
- During his negotiations with the Dosi, Quark learns that he'll need to contact the Dominion if he wants to fill his order. I think this is the first time we've heard that name; I somehow doubt it will be the last. And given where I suspect this goes, I'm hella impressed to hear the name tossed out so casually.

“Necessary Evil” (season 2, episode 3; originally aired 11/14/1993)

In which Odo solves a mystery, much to his sorrow

I'm pretty sure I could kill someone if I had to. It's a weird thing to know about yourself, and I'm really hoping I never have to prove it one way or the other, because I think that's the sort of test where you lose either way. But yeah, if it came down to protecting someone I loved, and I had the means, I'd be able to do commit murder. This isn't a brag, because it's not something to be proud of, nor is it something that feels particularly unique to myself. If I had to put money on the question, I'd bet most of you could also kill. You know, if you had to. There's a tendency in movies and fiction to equate that final step as being some sort of moral Rubicon, a line in the sand that only an elect few, for good and for ill, can ever cross, but that's bullshit. It's not like pulling the trigger on a gun or stabbing another human being in the gut is a rare act. People get murdered all the damn time. The job, then, of anyone who wants to be moral and just, is to try and avoid situations that force the issue. There's no magical switch in your brain that ensures you are incapable of evil acts. (Most of us do not come from a frogurt shop.) Every day, you have to decide how far that line goes, not because of some ingrained

reflex pushing against you, but because of how easy it is to go too far; because of how quickly seemingly straightforward dilemmas become complex systems of uncertainty. And even when you do your best to not break your own code, even when you're absolutely convinced that killing was the only choice you had—there's no guarantee you're right. There's no blue-ribbon panel of experts to give you a thumbs up. And even if there was, that doesn't mean the people closest to you will ever look at you the same way again.

The fascinating, quietly devastating “Necessary Evil” doesn't look like it's an episode about Odo and Kira's friendship. At least, not at first, and even when we realize that Kira's going to be involved with Odo's current investigation, there's no reason to think she's anything more than a red herring. That's what I assumed, probably because I was so distracted by all the coolness the rest of the episode throws out. What starts off looking like a fun but almost certainly goofy murder mystery involving Quark, his brother, and some mysterious Bajoran femme fatale quickly turns into a chance for Odo to reminisce about the past, complete with flashbacks to his time on Deep Space Nine during the Cardassian occupation. Those flashbacks dominate the hour, showing a less confident Odo dragged into his first assignment at the order of Gul Dukat. While I vaguely remember seeing glimpses of Kira's past before, this is the first chance we've had on the show to see *DS9* during Dukat's reign, and while it's about as unhappy a place as you'd expect, it makes for riveting viewing.

This is, as far as I can recall, the first time any *Star Trek* series has ever done a serious “how the band got together”-style episode. The original series certainly never bothered with it, because back-story there was created almost entirely on the fly, and continuity never viewed as a primary concern. We found out a few things about Spock (hard-nose Dad, human mom, freaky mating rituals), and every so often Kirk would run into somebody he knew from the old days, but most of this were matters of convenience necessary for the events at hand. The idea of a sustained history created to deepen the characters and the world didn't really come into play until later—what mattered was what happened on the screen, then and there. *TNG* expanded on this somewhat, giving us a semi-origin story in the [pilot](#) (aka, “This is how most everybody got on the Enterprise and met Q”), some semi-mythology with Data, and [“Tapestry,”](#) the great sixth-season episode that has Picard traveling back in time to learn the importance of being stabbed. But while *TNG* was a lot more serious about continuity than *TOS* ever was, it still never does what “Necessary Evil” does here. Apart from the pilot, all of *TNG*'s back-story was fashioned in isolation. When we learned Riker made some dumb choices as a junior officer, or that Picard struggled with his temper, those incidents were about the characters and the characters alone, and didn't serve to connect either character to the rest of the ensemble, or to the world of the show as we then knew it.

With “Necessary Evil,” we get an episode whose primary focus is to enrich our understanding of certain key figures on the show, as well as slightly recontextualize *DS9* itself. Simply showing Odo in the olden days (i.e. before now) would've been enjoyable enough, but here, we see him on a version of the station which is very different from the current one, a version which was implied at the start of the series (remember the mess?), but never quite hit home like this one does. Not only that, we see Odo meeting Gul Dukat, and I have to admit, this is probably the first time Dukat ever really took off

for me. I've read comments talking about what a terrific villain he is and nodded my head, but this may be the first episode Marc Alaimo truly shines. The Dukat who greets Odo in the first flashback is horribly, horribly friendly. The sort of friendly that makes you feel smaller every time he says your name.

Most of what we've previously seen of Dukat put him on the opposite side of the power structure; he's already lost Bajor, and while he's surely plotting to return, his plots have been deep-cover stuff we only have stumble across at the moment of crisis, when Sisko and Kira and our other heroes turn the tide. Manipulative villains can be great, but because manipulation, when done well, is the subtle act of making others do what you want done without them realizing it, it's not enough to just say, "He's out there. Oooooo." You need to make an effort to demonstrate just how powerful all that manipulation can be. To put it another way, one of the reasons Ben on [Lost](#) was such an amazing bad guy is one of the reasons people often cite as proof of Michael Emerson's genius: the way the character was elevated from a henchman to Grand Vizier only after his first few appearances on the show.

Now, I don't dispute Emerson is a terrific actor, but it's worth pointing out that the decision to make "Henry Gale" into a major player wasn't simply a matter of rewarding talent—it was also a brilliant narrative move. We get to see for a sustained period of time how effective this character was at controlling a situation even when he was nominally at the mercy of his enemies. Ben ran rings around Locke, managing within a few days to zero in on the fundamental crack in Locke's psychology which had been sitting there, waiting to explode since the fourth episode of the show; but even more importantly, Ben fucked with our heads. He beat us, because we never really knew one way or the other how important he was right until the big reveal. Of course he had to be the main bad guy. Who could ever top that? Gul Dukat pulls off a similar trick in "Necessary Evil." Meeting with Odo, giving Odo a job to find out the identity of a murderer—well, that's obviously Bad Guy 101. He's clearly up to something. But he seems so relaxed and open and charming about it, and he has such good reasons for giving Odo the gig, that maybe... A great manipulator should make you doubt yourself even when past experience has given you every reason to doubt them. This is the first sign that Dukat is in that category.

So we get to see Dukat in his element, and we get to see a humble, half-terrified Odo trying to figure out his place in the world. We get to see the station full of starving refugees and laughing Cardassians, and everything's in a low light and miserable-looking. And we get to see Kira with long hair, meeting Odo for the first time. This might be the single most important aspect of the episode, because it expands Odo's memories beyond just himself. Dukat is just an intermittent bad guy—Kira is a regular presence, and by having her pop up here, we get to understand the character more in the same way we're getting to understand Odo. And we're seeing how these two came together, which is a big deal, because it enriches their relationship. We knew they had a history, but now we're seeing it in action, so it becomes, in effect, part of our history with the show. From now on, when we see them, we'll have this memory in the back of our heads, and we'll know that they have that same memory, and it means their interactions are more than just ways of meeting immediate plot demands. A similar thing

happens when Odo meets Quark for the first time; the back and forth between the two of them helps to explain how they deal with each other in the present. Plus, it's just fun to watch. It's like seeing a friend hanging out with other people you don't know, but he does. You're seeing a different side to someone you assumed you knew.

Then there's the ending, when we learn that Kira, who Odo (and me, and I'm assuming most of the audience) dismissed as uninvolved with the murder, actually killed Mr. Vaatrik. Vaatrik was a Bajoran working with the Cardassian government to betray the Bajoran underground, and he had a list of other Bajoran spies in his shop. Kira went to grab that list, Vaatrik caught her, and she killed him. This is understandable, and it fits with the episode's title; killing is wrong, but compared to what would've happened if Vaatrik was allowed to proceed, one life is arguably worth sacrificing for many. But the title has multiple meanings. The "necessary evil" here isn't just Kira killing Vaatrik. It's Kira lying to Odo about what she did, banking on his trust and compassion to get away with it. She uses the knowledge that another Bajoran freedom fighter had been assigned to sabotage the station the night of the murder as an alibi, putting her at Odo's mercy in such a way as to distract him from the whole truth. By confessing her role in the rebellion, Kira gives Odo just enough of the truth to make him trust her, but holds back enough to let him let her go without violating his own code of ethics. When Dukat comes calling, Odo can both protect Kira, and, he believes, be completely honest when he tells the Gul that Kira had nothing to do with Vaatrik's death.

It's understandable that Kira is nervous when Odo finally learns the truth. Their friendship is one of the touchstone relationships of the show. It's not usually the main focus of any given hour, but it's been there since the beginning, and Kira values Odo's opinion of her. Kira is a woman perpetually in the act of proving herself, and Odo is the most perfect arbiter of character-worth: he's an outsider, he's detached, but he's just sympathetic enough not to be a complete dick about it. And now she's failed him. The murder was bad enough, but she betrayed the most important aspect of their friendship, their trust, and she never told him about it until she was forced to by circumstance. That puts her in a sketchy position, and even though it's entirely possible to see where's she's coming from, it still makes sense that the episode ends on an ambiguous note. Given the nature of his existence, Odo has spent his life apart from other sentient beings, and, seeing where he ended up, it's reasonable to assume he has a somewhat cynical view of them. He expects people to let him down; he expects that we can murder each other for reasons beyond comprehension. That Kira could kill couldn't have been a surprise, but the way she tricked Odo—however good her intentions were—was. She showed him that his best, most noble impulses, could be used against him. That's not a lesson anyone wants to learn from a friend, no matter how necessary it is.

Stray observations:

- My favorite "How the band got together" episode: "Out Of Gas" from *Firefly*. It might even be my favorite episode of that show. I never get tired of it.
- I hope we never find out what the "Cardassian neck trick" is.
- "You're not as stupid as you look." "I am too!"—Odo, breaking Rom

- Rom has the best scream.

Next week: We worry Bronson Pinchot will show up with “Second Sight,” and start our run to “Sanctuary.”

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Second Sight”/“Sanctuary”[Zack Handlen](#)[5/03/12 10:00AM](#)**“Second Sight” (season 2, episode 9; originally aired 11/21/1993)***In which Sisko falls in love with someone else’s dream*

I started getting a bad feeling when Captain Sisko’s potential new love interest, a beautiful woman named Fenna, disappeared before they finished their first conversation. As Fenna kept popping up, and Sisko became more and more infatuated with her, my bad feeling got worse. It didn’t take me long to realize why; “Second Sight” feels like a Troi episode. If you’ve seen enough [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#), you know that Deanna Troi wasn’t one of the show’s strongest characters. Marina Sirtis did what she could with the role, and she had her moments, but the premise of a ship’s counselor who could sense the feelings of others (through a telepathic link that only functioned when the narrative required) was flawed. Worse, Troi-centric episode were almost universally horrid, and tended to use the character’s questionably useful gifts to get up to all sorts of nonsense. It sometimes felt as though every other week Troi was being seduced by some creepy ambassador who wanted to drain her life force or getting knocked up by a twinkling light so an alien could have a humanoid experience. These stories forgot about thoughtful character work or smart science fiction in favor of insipid, unpleasantly creepy camp, and while Sisko’s conversations with Fenna are certainly pleasant, there’s a definite vibe of, “Oh, looks like someone lit the candle tonight, eh?” (Which is a joke about [“Sub Rosa,”](#) which is a Beverly Crusher episode, not a Troi episode, because basically *TNG* had problems doing stories for its female leads.)

What it comes down to is a twist with no meaning beyond being a twist: Sisko's falling in love with the psychic projection of a woman in an unhappy marriage. This sounds like it could be fraught with drama, but it isn't. There are dramatic moments, sure, and the husband's decision to sacrifice himself for his wife's sanity is an interesting turn, but all we ever know about the wife (who's named "Nidell" when she's awake, and played by Salli Richardson-Whitfield in both forms) is that she's unhappy sometimes, and other times she's not. She is pure gimmick, right down to the bone, which means Fenna's scenes with Sisko are generically pleasing—and little else. She asks him the right questions, she wants him to show her the station and take her on a picnic, which is all very nice, but there's nothing to her beyond the presentation of an attractive and desirable romantic partner. Nidell has barely a handful of lines as "herself"; her husband, Professor Gideon Seyetik (Richard Kiley) delivers her back-story while she's lying unconscious in the other room. She's a device, and, presumably, we're supposed to be so impressed by the reveal that Sisko's new lady friend is a "psychoprojective telepath" (oh that old saw) that we don't notice that's basically all she is. Abilities or gimmicks should reflect character or enhance it; they can't work as a basic substitute.

That's what happens here, which raises all kinds of problems. For one, despite the lovey-dovey scenes with Sisko and his eventual heartbreak, this episode is all about Gideon. He's the forceful, gregarious one, a terraformer with a huge ego who spends as much time telling others about his ego as he does telling them about his accomplishments. Given the nature of the character, it's not surprising that Gideon would dominate every scene he's in, and Kiley is fun to watch, depending on your level of tolerance for this sort of thing. (It's also fun to watch the various crewmembers' reactions; Kira can't stand him, and Bashir is clearly entertained.) He goes off about how wonderful he is and how much everyone, especially his wife, loves him, and he's just funny enough for it to not be the worst thing ever. And as characters go, he's not bad at all. His behavior makes sense, fits his job, and is consistent throughout the episode, even up to the point when he decides to sacrifice himself to save his wife from ennui. He's the hero of the story in his mind, and if he can find a way to do a good deed while ensuring that he'll never have to worry about topping his previous successes ever again, that's what he's going to do.

This works on a character level, but it doesn't work for the story as a whole, because we never get Nidell's side of what's going on. We get Gideon's version of Nidell's side, and yeah, he doesn't paint a sympathetic portrait of himself (again, this makes sense; egotists often get a lot of mileage out of constantly pointing out their most obvious flaws, in the service of controlling their own message—even criticism is part of the act), but that doesn't change the fact that he's still the one doing all the talking. Even when he's sort of a monster, he makes the right decisions, and we never hear enough from Nidell to understand why this is such a big deal; why, in fact, their marriage is apparently so awful it threatens to kill her. Even at the very end, when Nidell is free, she doesn't say anything for herself.

She's a cipher, and in addition to throwing off the episode's balance, her fundamental lack of character reduces the supposed emotional center of the hour to an empty exercise. More than anything else, this cripples "Second Sight," turning it from an intermittently entertaining but ultimately forgettable

hour into a betrayal of a character we care about. Sisko makes a point of mentioning in his log at the start of the episode that he's had trouble sleeping lately, and he thinks it has something to do with the fourth anniversary of his wife's death. So he's in a vulnerable mood when he starts wandering around the station, staring out windows, and that's where Fenna finds him. At first, this looks to be, at least in part, an exploration of Sisko's grief. He hasn't had any serious romantic relationships since Jennifer, partly because he's sad and busy, and also (and I may be inferring), he's an intense dude. Unless they have goatees and cool glasses, intense dudes don't always have the easiest time with the ladies. Mostly, though, it's his mourning. Then he meets Fenna, who seems like the ideal woman to help him move on from his grief, and for a while, he's really happy. Then everything turns to shit.

Sisko's excitement over a new relationship is great, especially when you notice that he (unlike Troi or Dr. Crusher) never completely loses his common sense. There's a great scene when Jake tells him, "I just want you to know, if you're in love, that's all right with me," which lets you know that whatever else happens, Sisko is doing a good job raising his son right. And seeing Dax push him for info when things with Fenna start taking off is another fun glimpse into their friendship, because it's just so normal; if you can get past the fact that Sisko is hanging out with a young woman who's serving as the host body for a slug that once lived inside (and took up half the brain of) one of Sisko's best friends, this is just the sort of stuff friends do.

Unfortunately, once the main plot takes over and we learn Fenna's horrible secret (is psychoprojective telekinesis useful in any way? From what we see, it's just a very elaborate way for her to commit inadvertent suicide), Sisko's story takes a backseat. Obviously he's frustrated and disappointed when he learns he's being unintentionally used, but that's how anybody in his situation would react. He tries to handle the situation as rationally as possible, but he's basically irrelevant to what's happening, a witness to a situation he can barely understand, let alone change. This is bad storytelling, using a strong idea—Sisko's lingering sense of loss—in order to trick us into caring about a plot that has nothing to do with that loss. In the end, Gideon is dead and Nidell is saved, but she doesn't remember anything about being Fenna or the time Fenna spent with Sisko. It's the inevitable reset button that shows just how little the writers of this episode (all four of them) cared about making this matter. There's nothing wrong with a one-off story that lacks long-term implications, but if you do that, maybe you shouldn't start by reminding us about the hero's dead wife.

Stray observations:

- Fenna/Nidell represents an interesting design compromise; she has to look alien so we can believe she has magical powers or whatever, but she also has to be beautiful to help justify Sisko's immediate attraction. So we get slightly weird ears and a cleavage-enhancing dress.
- Sisko has no moral reservations whatsoever about using Odo to track Fenna down. Not that he should, exactly, but it does tell us he's willing to bend the rules a little to get what he thinks is necessary.

“Sanctuary” (season 2, episode 10; originally aired 11/28/1993)*In which you’ve got your Mecca in my Mecca, you son of a bitch*

If “Second Sight” is an episode that started with an interesting idea (Sisko and the dead Mrs. Sisko), “Sanctuary” starts with what seems like a generic premise and builds up steam as it goes along. We’re a little under halfway through *Deep Space Nine*’s second season, but the hook of having some strange new alien pop out of the wormhole and cause havoc on the station is, to put it kindly, old hat. This makes complete sense. The *Star Trek* franchise was built on the idea of exploration, with a vehicle that made it possible to have adventures on a new planet every week. Setting the new show on a space station would presumably limit the ensemble’s mobility, but the wormhole, at least in theory, makes a perfect substitute for a warp drive. But theory only goes so far, and the more the show uses this particular trope, the more obvious it’s going to be as a workaround. You change your storytelling approach, you need to follow through; otherwise, people are going to notice the strings.

So, after some station business, “Sanctuary” gets down to business when Sisko has O’Brien beam a group of strangers out of a dying ship which, you guessed it, just popped out of the wormhole. These strangers are so new that the Universal Translator needs some time to start decoding their language, and we’re treated to a not bad, slightly silly sequence of scenes as Kira leads the group out of Ops, through the promenade and Bashir’s office, and then to their new room. The aliens—basic humanoid design, although they’ve got rough skin and loopy hairdos—grab at everything, spout gibberish at the clothing shops, and act generally goofy, until the UT finally catches up, and the leader of the group, a female named Haneek, reveals that she and her people are running from their homeworld, and they believe that the wormhole fulfills part of their search. Now, they just need to find Kentanna, the sanctuary world that will serve as their new home. Oh, and by the way, there are 3 million more where Haneek came from, just the other side of the wormhole, looking for a way to come through.

This episode has all kinds of warning signs; Haneek’s hairdo is really ridiculous, and the way she and her fellow pilgrims act before the UT kicks in make them look like a bunch of clowns. Then there’s the revelation, fairly early on, that Haneek’s people (the Skrreeans) live in a matriarchal society. The men, Haneek tells Kira and Sisko, are simply too emotional to be entrusted to positions of power, although, of course, they love their men. Matriarchies are difficult concepts to pull off, because the temptation to make them unsubtle satires of the way women are too often politically (and otherwise) marginalized in this country is strong, and those satires come off as lectures or worse. And in the process, it looks less like satire and more like a way of pointing out that the idea of ladies running anything is so ridiculous that how could anyone possibly take it seriously? (Remember [“Angel One”](#)? Better yet, don’t.) I wasn’t sure by this point in the episode where things were headed, and it was easy to get worried that the comedy would get more ridiculous, or we’d watch Kira teaching Haneek the joy of life with the Federation, or Haneek would start ordering guys on the station around just because.

Thankfully, things didn’t go any of those ways. The comedy disappears, as does any serious talk about matriarchy. Though Kira and Haneek’s friendship proves important to the episode, “Sanctuary” is more about how difficult it is to go from being helpful to being willing to put up with the challenges of

forming long-term bonds. Soon after Haneek explains the plight of her people, the rest of the 3 million Skrreeans come through the wormhole, and some of them (presumably the most important ones) invade the station. They're noisy and dirty and they get in everyone's way; as Quark points out later, they clog up the shops but don't have the money to buy anything. Nog, presumably after hearing his uncle complain about the newcomers, sprays one of the boy-men who came with Haneek with a "stink spray," and the talks sort of break down from there. None of this is handled with much subtlety, but the episode does a decent job of showing how even the best intentions can beget chaos. Yeah, Quark is a jerk about it, and it's a little convenient that the only person to have any problem with the Skrreeans at all is the character in the ensemble who tends to represent all the least-pleasant aspects of our own natures. But while he's wrong, it's difficult to suddenly have a place you consider your home overrun with strangers. In a situation like that, it can be hard to maintain your basic decency.

Case in point: Haneek decides that Bajor is actually the sanctuary the Skrreeans are searching, and she wants to move all 3 million of her people to the planet at once. The Bajoran government politely, but firmly, rejects her request, claiming they already have enough mouths to feed, and despite Haneek's repeated assurance that her people would never ask for government assistance, well, the Bajorans feel they would simply be obligated to help in time of crisis, and then where would everybody be? It's a bit of politicking, designed as much for the Bajoran's own sense of decency as it is for Haneek, but it boils down to, "We don't want you, because we've got our own problems." Even that's probably finessing it the truth; the Bajorans, as we've already seen, are gunshy and on edge and prone to pushing away outsiders, for the simple fact that they finally have a chance to establish their own place in the universe, and they'll be damned if a bunch of wart-faced zealots try and claim Bajor as *their* homeworld.

Haneek is understandably disappointed about all of this, and one of the things that makes "Sanctuary" work is that the episode never pretends that she's unreasonable or demanding in her disappointment. Yeah, she says some harsh things to Kira at the end, thus demonstrating that friendships and governments don't really mix, but it's not hard to see where she's coming from. As she says, she and her people are farmers, and they might have been able to help Bajor with its current food crisis. (Although maybe not; that's basically a dig against the farmers already on Bajor, as though the Skrreeans have some special touch that would allow them to grow crops more readily than the natives who've been doing it for years.) She's not likeable, really, but maybe that's important; maybe it serves as a reminder that just because someone isn't exactly likeable doesn't make them wrong, especially when one of the reasons we're not fond of them is that they remind us of our own failings.

"Sanctuary"'s biggest drama comes when a frustrated Tumak decides to take a ship and fly to Bajor on his own recognizance. The Bajoran fleet is under strict orders not let any strangers land, there's a confrontation, and despite the efforts of everyone involved, Tumak's ship explodes. It's a well-handled sequence, showing better than anything else in the episode the way bureaucracy can mangle good intentions, and how fast a problem can turn from a minor irritant to an outright tragedy. If more of the episode had managed this feel—a mix of urgency and almost blackly comic chaos—it might have been more gripping. But the setup is too easy. Tumak is the only Skrreean who takes action after the

Bajoran decision, and he's literally the only Skrreean we meet who is anything but polite and nonviolent. Which supports Haneek's comment about emotional men, but it also makes his death both surprising *and* weirdly convenient. Once Tumak is gone, everyone else is willing to leave without a fuss. Haneek manages a parting shot at poor Kira, and that's the end.

That's what keeps this episode from being more than basically good, I think. It raises a number of interesting issues, but raising interesting issues doesn't necessarily lead to great drama, especially when you don't have much in the way of followthrough. Haneek and her people show up, they receive some back-story, they annoy some strangers, and then they move on. The only consequence is a dead kid (who, let's be honest, was kind of a dick), and Kira has one more scratch on her conscience.

"Sanctuary" is more complex and satisfying than "Second Sight," but too much of it feels like a civics lesson instead of a story.

Stray observations:

- I appreciate that it's difficult to come up with new names for alien races in the *Trek*-verse. Given the show's history and the scope of its media presence, most of the easy names have been taken. Still... "Skrreean"? Really? That's just "Skreean" with a canonical typo, and the only people who would ever even notice it would be obsessive nerds, and those folks don't really need more pointless details to drive them insane.
- The Skrreeans were conquered by the T-Rogorans, who were themselves conquered by the Dominion. Hm. Those guys have been popping up a lot lately.
- Tumak is played by the late Andrew Koenig, Walter Koenig's son. He's fine here, if a little over the top.
- Oh right, Kira gets a musician a gig at Quark's place. I wouldn't be surprised if we see him again, but for now, he's incidental (and annoying.)

Next week: We face off against some "Rivals," and come face to face with "The Alternate."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Rivals”/“The Alternate”Zack Handlen5/10/12 10:00AM**“Rivals” (season 2, episode 11; originally aired 1/2/1994)***In which games can ruin lives, but mostly don't*

Sometimes you get bad TV which fails because the tone is off, or because the script spells everything out, or because familiar characters are behaving in contradictory ways. Sometimes, you get bad TV that screams its badness in your face, the visual equivalent of biting on tinfoil, scratching Styrofoam, listening to “Revolution 9.” And sometimes, you get bad TV that shrugs.

For most of its running time, “Rivals” is passable. The main story, revolving around guest star Chris Sarandon and a strange alien artifact, is silly and routine, suffering most of all from the fact that it spends too much time on a character we’ve never seen before. The B-story isn’t half bad, hopefully moving us one step closer to a full on Bashir and O’Brien friendship. And it all builds to a big finish, and then just sort of stops. The main plot has an ending which manages to resolve all major questions without managing a satisfactory sense of closure; the secondary plot is distracted by something shiny, wanders off, and never comes back. This is a bad hour of television. It’s not egregiously irritating or offensive (unless you find sloppiness offensive—which, okay, I kind of do). It’s just sloppy, and serves to point out the importance of structure in narrative, even if that structure can sometimes seem overly familiar.

We meet Martus Mazur (Sarandon) in the cold open, trying his best to run a con on a sweet old lady who happens to be widowed, wealthy, and waiting for it. Odo catches him in the act and throws him in a cell, where he meets an alien with a purple egg, and that, as the saying goes, is where his troubles

begin. Sort of. This is a setup with a very clear arc: A just-charming-enough-to-be-sympathetic bad guy is tempted by a too good-to-be-true offer; he accepts after some initial reservations, briefly succeeds beyond his wildest dreams; then, at the moment of his greatest triumph, everything falls apart in the worst way, and the bad guy suffers a suitably ironic comeuppance. That's solid stuff, and the episode follows it note by note, right up to the underdone conclusion. But solid or not, it doesn't really work. Sarandon is a fine actor (See also: The original *Fright Night*; he makes a terrific vampire), and he's appropriately oily and charismatic as Martus, but this isn't someone we have any investment in. Which is problematic, since the character dominates the first half of the episode. While it can be rewarding to have an outsider come and give us a new look at the same old surroundings, that's not what Martus is here for; apart from reminding us that Quark doesn't like competition and that Odo has a tendency to arrest criminals, he barely interacts with the main ensemble. I would guess that Martus exists so the narrative can have a one-off character who can suffer or succeed however much story needs him to—but nothing happens to the guy. He ends the episode in roughly the same place he started it, and if this is the introduction to a recurring guest star, it does a lame job selling the idea. I have little to no interest in seeing this character again, and I *like* Sarandon.

Then there's the fact that Martus' story doesn't fit in the *Trek*-verse. There's the fact that the device he finds is established for much of the episode's running time as a magical, vaguely threatening thingy, without any real history or clear purpose. The device's last owner tells a story straight out of the [Twilight Zone](#)—he didn't just make some bad financial calls, he believes the device itself destroyed his life through vaguely supernatural means. Any time a *Trek* show tries to muddle about with the vaguely supernatural, the results are dicey. It's a fine line, but as silly as all those tech-babble explanations are, they help create the illusion that everything in the show exists in a specific universe. Trying to cheat that by throwing in ghosts or cursed objects is only going upset everyone, even when the episode tries to come up with some realistic justification. Take ["Sub Rosa,"](#) a terrible hour of TV for many reasons. Beverly Crusher has sex with a ghost, and it's terribly uncomfortable and weird, and then we find out the "ghost" is actual some strange form of alien life that works as a succubus for the Crusher family DNA. Something like that, anyway; my point is, none of this suddenly made everything leading up to the explanation make sense. You can't Scooby-Doo this sort of thing, because the damage is already done. I'm sure there examples of this actually working (none spring to mind, but that doesn't mean they don't exist), but it's very difficult to pull off well. "Sub Rosa" doesn't come close; despite it's somewhat scientific ending, "Rivals" doesn't really try.

The other reason Martus doesn't fit is more difficult to parse. We've talked about how *Deep Space Nine* is a darker show than the previous two *Trek* series. I doubt we've plumbed the depths yet, but in its first two seasons, *DS9* has struggled with grimmer themes, and the show's premise—which forces the cast to the same location week in, week out—means that even fairly closed-off episodes have a lingering impact. But the darkness of *DS9* is complex, driven primarily by the complications of war and social upheaval. The show generally avoids simplistic morality, and that's all Martus's story really is: he's selfish and greedy, he gets in over his head, and he pays the price. Again, this is *Twilight Zone*-esque, with a little *Tales From The Crypt* thrown in. I spent much of the first half of the episode

wondering what Martus' inevitable downfall would be, and just how bad things would go for him. Considering the last owner of the purple egg died holding it (right after saying, "I won!" which is not promising at all), anything seemed possible. We don't learn anything about Martus, we don't get any reason to care about what happens to him. We just hang around waiting for dropping shoes, and for the amount of screen time he's given, that doesn't work. It's Aesop's Fables on a show that's been giving us a fair approximation of Dostoevsky.

Thankfully, while Martus is getting up in Quark's business, O'Brien and Bashir are off playing space racquetball, and experiencing some difficulties. Despite the fact that the two men appeared to be getting on well enough at the end of ["The Storyteller,"](#) O'Brien has clearly gone back to disliking the younger man on sight, and when he finds Bashir hanging out in the special court O'Brien himself built for his favorite game, things get a little awkward. They get even more awkward when the two have a match together and Bashir turns out to be the superior player. This isn't a huge surprise; as Keiko (who is pretty great in this episode) points out, O'Brien isn't as young as he used to be, and no amount of stretching and jogging is going to turn him into a 25-year-old. But O'Brien is furious and insecure, while Bashir is embarrassed. As he explains to Dax, he doesn't want to humiliate the Chief or drive him to a heart attack, but the more he tries to beg off, the more aggressively O'Brien pursues a rematch. It's a fine set-up for both characters, as it's easy to be sympathetic to either side. Sure, O'Brien is being unreasonable, but no one wants to be beaten at something they love, and it can be hard to accept that, for some things, you're best days are already behind you. And sure, Bashir has that whole callow youth vibe going on, but he honestly does care what O'Brien thinks of him, and really does want to find a way out of the situation that won't make the other man feel worse.

While none of this is life and death, I was more invested in O'Brien and Bashir's story than I was in anything to do with Martus, not even after Martus manages to replicate and embiggen the purple eggs and use them to start his own gambling club. But then everything goes off the rails. Quark, desperate to drum up business, forces O'Brien and Bashir to hold a public rematch, and during the game, Bashir starts losing. Not just losing; he's bombing, and bombing hard, while O'Brien is playing the best game of his life. The two men quickly realize that something is wrong, and stop the match. They bring in Sisko and the others to observe the phenomenon, and it's just as well, since other strange things have been happening all over the station: minor accidents, small catastrophes, and lots of tripping. Turns out that Martus' devices have some weird affect on probability, and now—oh, you wanted to know what happened with O'Brien and Bashir? Yeah, so did I, but unfortunately, it's never resolved. Martus loses his devices (and falls for a con), but he finds his way off the station to freedom in the end, which means the writers basically chickened out on giving him the sort of downfall they'd foreshadowed at the beginning, which in turn means his whole tale just comes off as pointless. It's worse for O'Brien and Bashir, because as enjoyable as their scenes together are, they're all just a slightly more sophisticated version of padding. No one had any intention at providing a resolution. Normally I appreciate it when a story resists an easy ending, but no ending at all is, well...

Stray observations:

- Bashir has a fun bit while he's talking with Dax—he's looking for a salt shaker, and every one he picks up is empty. It's a small gag (and maybe connected to the Martus plot), but it works because it plays against his frustrations at dealing with O'Brien.
- Another oddity about the ending: The woman who conned Martus comes back to the station after taking his money, only to be caught by Odo while she's trying to con someone new. This seems incredibly stupid to me.

“The Alternate” (season 2, episode 12; originally aired 1/9/1994)

In which Odo has a bad reaction to a familiar face

I don't think either of my parents have ever read any of my reviews. I'm not absolutely sure of this—I suppose it's possible that Mom or Dad is scanning this sentence right now and preparing a friendly but appropriately scathing e-mail about assumptions and telling tales out of school and would it kill me to call, even a little—but I've never asked them to, and I don't think they'd be all that interested in this kind of work. If I was 10 years old, I'd be upset about this; but I'm not, so I'm not. As a kid, I was a big one for showing off report cards, essays, short stories, and I made sure some representative of parental support would attend every show I ever had a line in, ever chorus concert in which I ever sang a note. But then I went off to college, and then I got older, and at a certain point, Mom and Dad's approval stopped meaning so much. Well, that's not quite right; it's more that I started to resent how much I needed their approval, because the need, I thought, represented a part of my life that was now officially over. I was my own man, which meant I got to decide what mattered and what didn't in my own life. While the resentment faded (thank goodness!), the knowledge behind it didn't. I love my parents, and I hope they're proud of me, but it works best when we don't get hung up on the details.

And hey, at least I'm not a shape-shifter who spent the first four years of his conscious existence in a lab. In “The Alternate,” Odo reunites with Dr. Mora (James Sloyan), the scientist who first studied, then essentially raised Odo in his early days. It's a difficult situation for both men, although Dr. Mora doesn't recognize the difficulty at first; Odo obviously has mixed feelings about his time on Bajor, and at times, this almost feels like an abuse story, albeit one that is far more subtle and less painful than those stories so often are. Throughout the hour, scenes with Odo and Mora together manage to capture a variety of emotions from both characters, as Odo is by turns embarrassed and uncomfortable to have such a clear reminder of his old life on the station, even while he works to win Mora's approval; for his part, Mora is proud of how far his old charge has come, but he's more than a little confused at just what Odo is trying to accomplish. If Odo, despite his protestations, views Mora as a father figure, Mora seems to have trouble separating the son from the experiment, which leads him to make the common parental mistake of assuming what you think is best for someone was, is, and always will be the only real option.

I have this theory that plot always works best when it's an extension, or expression, of character. This is more a general idea than a rule, but one of the reasons genre fiction so often struggles for critical acceptance is that so much of it is more about things happening to people than it is about people making things happen (whether they want to or not). You have your heroes, they'll be going about their regular lives, and then some monster will show up and cause havoc; the heroes run and fight and work together to slay the beast; and then everything goes back mostly to the way it was before, although we're kind of sad now that the janitor is dead. There's nothing wrong with this: when done well, it can be terrifically exciting and great fun. But the heroes themselves in this scenario are largely irrelevant. We need someone there to create conflict and have someone to root for, but most of the time, they aren't directly connected to the monster, and the monster doesn't say much about who they are. A good writer will try and change this up, but unless they manage it just right, characterization and human interaction becomes secondary to the thing with claws that's bumping off your supporting cast. There are genre stories which transcend this structure with aplomb (*Night Of The Living Dead* springs to mind), but when they do, their writers know that the more character drives events, the more effective the storytelling. (For an example of how not to do this, watch [Super 8](#). It's a lovely, terrific movie about a group of kids hanging out and making movies and falling in love, right up until the monster arrives and everything turns to shit.)

How does this apply to "The Alternate"? Well, the plot of this episode is, in its way, nearly as lazy as "Rivals." There's more of an effort to tie everything together under the guise of pseudoscience, but the third act is both very dramatic and creepy, which helps distract from the fact that it's also pretty ridiculous. After all the setup about the potential discovery of Odo's home world just beyond the worm hole, and the discovery of an artifact and a small pile of organic material that shared genetic similarities with the constable, this all turns into an excuse to spray poor Odo with some alien gas, and make him go a little evil. While there's a much more definite, and powerful, conclusion to the hour than there was in "Rivals," there's still the frustrating sense that too much of the episode is a distraction from the real story. All that time spent studying the new life form and the artifact doesn't pay off in any significant way; maybe we'll come back to them later, since Odo's search for his past is an ongoing story, but for this episode, these details feel like the distraction part of a parlor trick, and that's too bad.

Yet "The Alternate" is a better episode overall because its main story—the whole "Odo turning into a monster" thing—is driven by the relationship between Odo and Dr. Mora. The gas is just an excuse for that relationship to become more heated. Throughout the episode, Mora makes repeated comments with intentionally or unintentionally dismiss Odo's new position as little more than a game; then he starts in trying to persuade Odo to come back to the lab. There's something a little sinister about Mora from the beginning, and Sloyan does a fine job hitting the balance between warmth and presumption. It's not that he's a mad scientist determined to exploit Odo to serve his own purposes; it's just that he's so convinced in the validity and importance of their work together that he can't comprehend anyone might say no. Worse, he doesn't seem quite convinced that Odo's personhood is anything more than a parlor trick.

Very little of this is dealt with directly over the course of the episode, which is a big reason why it's so effective. There's enough honest discomfort and honest affection in Odo and Mora's scenes to convey their relationship handily without ever giving us the comfort of having one of them be the bad guy. To be honest, I expected Mora to show his true colors eventually, which made the reveal that Odo was the monster which had been terrorizing the station all the more striking. It doesn't work, exactly, because it turns Odo himself into a kind of object—even though his resentment and frustration against Mora are what's driving him to act, he's still unaware of what's happening, which makes him a passive victim for the last 10 minutes or so. Worse than that, there's something goofy about putting all of this on some magic gas. It plays like a too-easy way to force the conflict between Odo and Mora to its head, and the *Alien*-esque scenes of the creature "stalking" various characters don't really fit the rest of the episode's attempt to take the surrogate father dynamic seriously.

But that dynamic saves "The Alternate" from being a complete write-off. The way the episode shifts its focus from Odo to Mora in the final act is a good way to help us see things from his side, and it leads to a couple of unsettling sequences: The first—in which Mora realizes Odo is the monster and goes to confront him with this knowledge, driving the shape-shifter to literally melt before his eyes—is horrifying, while the second—in which Mora uses himself as bait to tempt monster-Odo out of hiding, and then watches his former lab rat getting repeatedly zapped by a force-field—makes the doctor's ultimate conversion and heartfelt apology to Odo ring true. Really, this serves best as an example of how strong characters can overcome uneven writing. While "Rivals" short-changed its best storyline in favor of a guest star, "The Alternate" knows where its real heart is. Odo's justifiably proud of the life he's made for himself, and while he wants Mora to share that pride, he can't bring himself to admit the desire. Thankfully, all it takes is some alien substance and a few Hulk-outs to bring them both around.

Stray observations:

- The cold open, with Odo catching Quark in a corpse-scam, is fun. As is the exchange between Jake and Sisko about the joys of Klingon opera.
- Show of hands: How many of you cringed when Mora lectured Odo on how to be nicer to people?

Next week: We get back into the O'Brien and Bashir dynamic as they dance to the "Armageddon Rag," and then O'Brien has to listen closely for some "Whispers."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Armageddon Game”/“Whispers”Zack Handlen5/17/12 10:00AM**“Armageddon Game” (season 2, episode 13; originally aired 1/30/1994)***In which Bashir and O’Brien get stuck in the hell of Molasses Swamp*

This week, we get two episodes about warring alien civilizations; everybody’s looking for peace, but by the end of each episode, it doesn’t look like anyone had much luck finding it. O’Brien keeps getting the short end of the stick, because no one suffers quite so entertainingly as Colm Meaney. And both episodes demonstrate how the show is working towards more ambitious and morally complex storylines, without quite knowing how to handle them. Of the two, “Armageddon Game” is the most straightforward, as O’Brien and Bashir are inadvertently sucked into a peace-motivated massacre, barely escape with their lives, and have to struggle for survival while Sisko and everyone back on the station believe they’re dead. For the most part, it plays out as you’d expect: Bashir and O’Brien squabble a bit, O’Brien gets sick and Bashir tells a story about his past; meanwhile, Keiko doesn’t believe her husband is dead, and Sisko trusts her judgment. Things only get strange when we learn the motivation behind all the death. This is a plot that plays out on traditional lines while trying to experiment with twistier themes, and the effect, of a series which wants to be better but isn’t quite sure how to get there yet, is one that’s been coming up fairly often this season.

There's nothing seriously wrong with "Armageddon Game." There are strong character beats, some fine suspense, and a fun pay-off at the end; if I tuned in looking for some fun, low-expectation *Trek*, I would have been completely satisfied. The only sour note is the reveal that this whole thing came about because the two races which brought Bashir and O’Brien in to help are now trying to kill anyone with knowledge of the super biological weapon they needed aid in destroying. The Kellerun and the

T'Lani governments have teamed up to ensure that their newfound peace will be sustained, and they're going about it in the worst way imaginable, sealing their treaty with blood. This is Trek in its social-commentary mode, and while the story never goes full lecture, neither Ambassador Sharat of the Kellerun, or E'Tyshra of the T'Lani are more than one-note antagonists. They want to bury the past by eradicating the evidence, as though that would ever work for long. It's a complex idea, and would've been better served by an episode that was more willing to embrace the complex. What we get instead are two bad guys who do the exact same bad guy things we've seen bad guys do in countless shows before, only they're doing it to, in their minds, protect the future of their respective civilizations.

There's a certain amount of sense in that, I guess; it's not a smart plan, but it has a certain blind arrogance to it that makes its own kind of sense. They don't like their past, so they're just going to erase it. That's pretty old school *Trek*, and I'm surprised we didn't find out computers were somehow responsible for the whole mess. The situation gets more complicated with Starfleet personnel involved, though, to the point where it stops being a dark satire of extremism, and starts being pretty damn stupid. Bashir and O'Brien are outsiders, and while neither are huge names in the Federation, their deaths will be noticed. The cover-up for the mass-killing isn't bad, but it's a huge, and unnecessary, risk. If they'd just waited until Bashir and O'Brien had left, the T'Lani and Kellerun might have gotten away with their plan. It's not as though anyone from DS9 was going to keep checking in. Sharat and E'Tyshra insist that Bashir and O'Brien have to be killed along with everyone else with knowledge of the Harvesters. This despite the fact that both men have access to a universe full of unthinkable weapons through their various Federation contacts. Is the worry that the doctor and the engineer are going to sell back what they know? And it gets even more ridiculous once Sisko and Dax manage to beam their erstwhile colleagues onto a runabout. Instead of accepting that the battle is lost (at this point, Sharat and E'Tyshra could've just stonewalled any Starfleet investigation), they decide to fire on the runabout, effectively making a direct declaration of war, for no real reason. Yes, people make bad decisions in the heat of the battle, but the villains in this case are so archetypal in their vehemence that there's not enough character to hang their behavior on. By the end, they seem to be pursuing our heroes simply because heroes need to be pursued. If their reasoning had been more overtly selfish, this would've been understandable; but because they're ostensibly driven by a need to save lives, we need more justification for their willingness to take them.

That's the only major flaw, really. The episode even uses a trope I normally dislike—everyone grieves over protagonists we know very well aren't dead—to satisfying, and at times moving, effect. While Bashir and O'Brien are struggling planetside, Sisko gets the news the two have died in an apparent radiation blast, triggered by O'Brien's own mistake. (This, by the way, is also kind of dumb. Did they decide to blame O'Brien in order to throw off suspicion?) We get the expected arrangement of various cast members mourning the (not really) dead, but it doesn't come off as a waste of time or some kind of padding. Keiko's reaction is understated and sad, and Kira and Dax's conversation about Bashir's journals is a sweet, revealing conversation. Hell, Quark gets in on the act, delivering a toast to the fallen which is both character appropriate and strangely moving. There's the voyeuristic thrill of

imagining what it would be like to pull a Tom Sawyer and eavesdrop on your own funeral, but there's also a great sense of how close this ensemble has come together over the past season and a half. None of this comes across as over-stated or forced sentimentality, and it helps to reinforce our own sense of connection with the ensemble.

And then there are the scenes between Bashir and O'Brien on the planet. The two are still struggling to come to terms with each other; O'Brien still finds the doctor annoying, and Bashir is still eager to please. They have some good moments of connection in this episode, as O'Brien gets infected by a Harvester and is forced to rely on Bashir to do the necessary repair work to get them back home. They discuss marriage; Bashir has his doubts (and he expresses some audience concerns when he mentions how Keiko and O'Brien sometimes seem less than delighted by each other's company), and O'Brien settles the score on why his family means so much to him, despite the difficulties that might arise between them. Bashir even gives some backstory about the only woman he ever loved, a dancer he gave up when he decided to commit to a full-time career in Starfleet. There's a charming honesty to these conversations, well played by both actors, and while there's little surprise in the way they bond by the end, surprise is not the issue here. It's just enriching to watch characters we like grow to tolerate each other, as it means from now on, whenever they're together on screen, we know they share this history, and whatever harsh words pass between them, the history will remain.

Stray observations:

- Another reason to appreciate this episode: when Keiko decides something is wrong with the security tape, Sisko trusts her judgment and gets to work. We don't waste time with a lot of, "Dear, I know you miss your husband, but are you sure that isn't clouding your judgment?" crap. It's refreshing.
- That said, the reveal at the end that Keiko's whole reason for being suspicious was invalid (O'Brien does, in fact, drink coffee in the afternoon) is terrific.

"Whispers" (season 2, episode 14; originally aired 2/6/1994)

In which O'Brien is not himself today

I love puzzles. I'm not obsessed or anything, and whenever I try and do a jigsaw or solve a crossword or figure out a logic problem, there's a decent chance I'll get distracted and bored after ten minutes and wander off, but I love the idea of a puzzle. I love a game that has rules and a solution and you just need to look at it the right way to make it all work out properly. I find that very satisfying. It's one of the reason I love genre stories so much; science fiction and horror are often inclined towards the puzzling, establishing mysteries and raising unanswered questions to pull readers through a narrative. (Weirdly, I've never been a huge fan of mysteries in and of themselves. I like I just like magic and weirdness.) I'm a huge sucker for well-constructed trickery, although I don't believe that sort of thing is ever entirely satisfying in its own right. The only drawback to all this is that the more you love the puzzle part of storytelling, the more primed you are to go into a movie or a book or a TV show looking

to “solve” it. At least, that’s how it works for me. I don’t much like it when people accuse me of thinking too much about fiction—this is basically just how my brain works, unless I’ve got a “Good/Nitpicking Bastard” switch on the back of my skull—but the line gets fuzzy when it comes to something like “Whispers.” Because it was so odd, and because there was so clearly something going on with O’Brien and the rest of the cast, I spent a good portion of the hour trying to figure it all out. And when you put your effort into figuring out where a story is headed, odds are, you’ll get the basics. I didn’t know that the O’Brien we spent most of the episode with was a clone of the real man, but I did figure out about twenty minutes in that the problem was with him, and not with the rest of the characters. So I spent every scene after that hoping I was wrong. It’s funny how it works; unlike a real puzzle, I never want to “solve” a plot. I want to be surprised. I just can’t help thinking it through, thought, and sometimes coming to conclusions.

Now, arguably the most striking aspect of “Whispers” is the fate of the O’Brien clone, and, again, I didn’t see that coming at all. But this happens in the last three minutes, which means we have just enough time to be shocked by the revelation, but not much time for anything else. To a certain extent, I don’t have problems with that; I like any work of art that can get in and get out without needing to over-stress its talking points. But while the abruptness here basically works in and of itself, it doesn’t make up for the decent but sort of one-note episode which preceded it. I mention how I dig puzzles, and how I’ll often reflexively work towards figuring out the end whenever I watch or read something, to try and give myself a little leeway. Maybe I’m being too harsh when I say the middle of “Whispers” feels like padding. It’s not awful, and I appreciated how long the writers and actors managed to maintain a spooky ambiguity about everything, but once you realize that it’s almost certainly O’Brien himself whose the source of the problem, it turns into the same scene over and over and over again. O’Brien talks with someone he should be friends with/married to, they behave strangely but not so strangely you could put your finger on it, and he gets suspicious. Rinse, repeat.

The episode starts well enough. O’Brien is in a runabout, headed to the Paradan System to warn the Paradans about... something. He’s vague at first, but instead of leaving us completely in the dark, the Chief opens up a personal log and starts trying to sift through the events of the past few days. Given the final twist, this is smart; we already have a definite investment in O’Brien (and we have no idea this isn’t the real one), but by starting with him on the run and alone, we’re put in a position where we automatically trust whatever he says, at least at first. He’s our perspective on events, and we’re conditioned straight away to be on his side when he flashes back to Keiko and the other’s strange behavior. Most of the episode takes place in O’Brien’s flashback, and after every commercial break, there’s a brief scene of him in the runabout, musing on his destination and wondering where it all went wrong. So in addition to making this O’Brien’s story (which comes into play at the end), the runabout scenes also serve to repeatedly reminds us that this is all going somewhere. O’Brien’s life hinges on a question mark, and he’s determined to find out what comes next.

Not that there’s anything wrong with that. It’s just, once the basic idea of the flashback becomes clear, they’re a lot less exciting. Seeing O’Brien wake up and find Keiko already out of bed, his daughter reluctant to touch him, his wife clearly uncomfortable having him in the apartment? That’s excellent,

demonstrating straight off that even the people who are nearest and dearest to the Chief have been affected by whatever is going on. It strips our hero of a safe place, even if he does initially dismiss Keiko's behavior as a bad mood. Watching Sisko smile at O'Brien in a way that never touches his eyes? Also excellent. Nobody does ambiguously creepy as effectively as Avery Brooks. "Whispers" does a fine job suggesting that all of this may be a bad case of body-snatchers. First, Bashir demands O'Brien come in for a physical, and when O'Brien (after getting marching orders from Sisko) is forced to comply, the session goes considerably longer than he was expecting; almost as if Bashir wasn't just checking his health, but getting a complete rundown on his body for means of duplication. Later, O'Brien meets Jake, who doesn't seem to have any problems at all with the Chief—at first. But Kira calls Jake away, and the next time the Chief sees the boy, he treats O'Brien the same everyone else has, as though the Jake we saw earlier had somehow been replaced. The same basic transition (minus Kira) happens with Odo.

Repetitive or not, this is a decent con, and the conclusion is even better. As mentioned above, when O'Brien finally gets to his destination, he gets shot, and we discover that he isn't the real O'Brien at all, but a clone created by the Paradan government with the design of sabotaging the peace talks that were scheduled to be held on DS9. The poor clone didn't realize he was a tool, and no one on the station could tell him; they weren't certain he was a duplicate, and there was no way to be sure what might set him off. Even if there'd been some way to determine that the clone was a complete pawn and honestly believed himself to be the real O'Brien, there was no way to explain the situation to him without risking a disaster. Which means that as upsetting as it was, the clone's death was largely inevitable. Maybe if he hadn't been so determined to do the right thing and warn the Paradans, he wouldn't have stumbled across the truth at such an inopportune moment. It's the tragedy the whole episode has been building to: a man gives everything he has to do the right thing, and dies knowing the only meaning he had in the world was to cause grief to the people he loved. That's heavy shit right there, and "Whispers" makes no attempt to mitigate the sadness. The moment the clone is shot and the real O'Brien is revealed, the focus of the scene moves away from the copy and onto the original. The dying man calls out his wife's name, but even then, he's barely understood, and while everyone feels bad, there's nothing anyone can do.

All right, if I'm so keen on the conclusion, if I like the beginning and have nice things to say about the middle, why am I mixed about the episode? Well, like I said, it isn't that hard to figure out O'Brien is the one with the problem, not the rest of the crew; and once I started to suspect this, it became impossible to invest too much in what happened next. But let's put that to one side. The twist here is legitimately surprising, playing off our assumptions in a way that would be nearly impossible to predict, and yet it doesn't come off as a cheat. It's just, well, the most interesting part of this episode happens in the last five minutes. The rest is well made and well acted, but it's only when Clone O'Brien gets shot and we learn the truth that the episode becomes anything more than just another one-off about an ensemble member having a wacky solo adventure. This doesn't mean it's a waste of time or outright bad, but it does keep "Whispers" a few steps shy of greatness. Even re-watching it with the knowledge of the clone's true identity (and his eventual fate) wouldn't change much. Since

he's a copy of O'Brien, he is O'Brien up until the moment when we learn the truth. We don't learn anything about him, beyond being reminded that the actual O'Brien is a smart, determined, and resourceful man, and just as importantly, we don't see any real drama in his interactions with others. They treat him like an impostor, because he is an impostor, but because we don't know for sure that's what's going on, the tension is mostly theoretical. As smart as the in media res opening is to get us on Clone O'Brien's side, it also has the unfortunate side effect of rendering large portions of the flashback unnecessary. Like, say, the clone's escape from the station.

Really, then, this isn't a question of me over-thinking it, or of the writers failing to sufficiently blow my mind. "Whispers" holds together and has a subversively dark conclusion. The downside is, that conclusion doesn't have any larger implication beyond, "Boy, it would suck to be a clone."

Stray observations:

- What was up with all the coffee Clone O'Brien drank? Every few minutes he was hitting up a replicator for a "Jamica blend, double strong, double sweet." I thought he was being drugged somehow.
- The twist ending reminds me a lot of Philip K. Dick's "Impostor." It was made into a terrible movie starring Gary Sinese, but the original short story is quite good, and worth checking out. Although I think I basically just spoiled it. Er. This is awkward.
- Quark mentions the racquetball game from ["Rivals."](#) Nice bit of subtle continuity there.

Next week: Sisko and O'Brien win two tickets to "Paradise," and Vedek Bareil returns for some "Shadowplay."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Paradise”/“Shadowplay”[Zack Handlen](#)[5/24/12 10:00AM](#)**“Paradise” (season 2, episode 15; originally aired 2/13/1994)***In which dashboard lights are not invited*

Belief in absolute solutions to the human conditions is a fool’s game. There’s no panacea, no perfect system, no universal key to the door of transcendence. Deep down, I think most of us know this. If we didn’t know it, why would we so desperately wish it wasn’t true? As adults, we recognize we are imperfect creatures, built by an indeterminate combination of genetic code and environmental pressures, and because we’re imperfect, we’re destined to a lifetime of striving to make each piece of ourselves whole. This is actually rather lovely, but appreciating that loveliness requires time and patience and the luxury of reflection. Most of us spend a good portion of the day-to-day in it up to the elbow, and on the worst days, when the world seems to be spinning at just the wrong angle from where you stand, when you’re so lost and alone that the street signs are written in someone else’s language—well, those are they days when you want to believe the lie. Those are the days when you want someone to come up to you with a steady hand and a soothing voice, and they’ll say, “It’s all right. I understand you. This will solve everything.” And you’ll follow wherever they’ll go, because the alternative is climbing back into the muck without knowing if you’ll ever again find your way free.

“Paradise” isn’t an episode for which I had high hopes; I wasn’t dreading it (I have enough faith in the show by now not to dread anything), but Big Idea *Trek* is hit-or-miss. The brief episode descriptions I read online said something about Sisko and O’Brien visiting a technology-free society, and going by that and the episode title, I had visions of some sort of Resurrection-style Eden, full of bland people in bland outfits espousing the sanctity of their blandness. There’s a bit of that here, but it turns out the

paradise of “Paradise” is more complex than those summaries let on. The episode gives Sisko the first chance in what feels like a long time to kick ass and take names, and has O’Brien demonstrating his usual resourcefulness and cool head in a crisis. It also gives us a solid villain in Alixus, the head of the colony Sisko and O’Brien stumble upon. “Paradise” suffers from the usual problems of Big Idea episodes, in that the new characters (with the sort-of exception of Alixus) aren’t really people so much as movable objects, and the efforts the script has to go to in order to make sure there’s no real spill over from what happens here to the rest of the show. But it works well for all that, only really dropping the ball in the final scene when it makes a jump it can’t quite support.

The premise—that a group of Federation castaways, forced into a decade-long exile on a planet where all their various tricorders and phasers and other toys don’t work—is an idea that *Trek* has come to before, and it always plays oddly in the franchise. The idea that going back to “basics” could somehow lead to a more fulfilling, purer life has been a popular theme in art for centuries, and the appeal makes sense; it goes back to the “solution” problem I mentioned above, because everyone’s life can feel over-stuffed or detached from reality. Turning away from all that is an appealing prospect, especially when you combine it with humanity’s love/hate relationship with technology. We’re addicted to our shiny computer screens, instant access, DVRs, and on-demand, but there’s a guilt beneath that addiction, like deep down we’re all pretty convinced that this isn’t going to be good for us in the long run. Maybe it’s a Garden of Eden thing; as adults, we imagine there was once a simpler time in our lives, and then that assumption just spreads out into other areas. Regardless, it’s a weird fit for a franchise that’s otherwise based around the glorious utopian possibilities of the future. These are shows in which humans in quasi-militaristic organizations with incredibly powerful weapons explore the galaxy and meet new life and new civilizations with no greater goal than just saying “Hello.” These people already have their shit together.

Admittedly, the folks on *Deep Space Nine* have more complicated relationships with the world and each other, so there’s room for ambiguity and odd angles. For most of its running time, “Paradise” does a fine job avoiding easy answers. The society O’Brien and Sisko discover is full of peaceful, content people, and while a few of them are interested in what’s going on in the outside universe, no one appears to be particularly upset when it looks like the two new guys are going to be stuck for a while. But on the down side, the group has lost a number of its members to a sickness they lack the tools to effectively treat, and the group leader, Alixus, is a hardliner who punishes law-breakers by throwing them in a small cargo container underneath the hot sun. (If you’ve ever seen *The Bridge On The River Kwai*, these scenes should be familiar, right down to Sisko’s refusal to bend even under brutal torture.) At first, the lady is all smiles and welcome, although she urges her followers not to get too excited about the possibility of a rescue. As time wears on, it becomes increasingly obvious that she never wants O’Brien and Sisko to leave, and when you start forcing people to join your hippie-Amish commune, you’re not a prophet, you’re a dictator.

What makes all of this work is that the episode maintains the appeal of the Thoreau-like lifestyle without shortchanging the fact that Alixus is basically running a cult. She starts leaving books around for the newcomers to read, books she wrote about the joys of working with your hands and the way

civilization lost its mojo when it started using tools more complicated than a handsaw. The irony is that she has to use technology in order to make her technology-free paradise possible, using a device buried in a nearby forest to create a duonetic field which—well, it’s basically magic, okay? And Alixus’ betrayal doesn’t stop there. The “crash” which brought the group members to this particular planet wasn’t an accident; Alixus arranged it in order to put her theories into action, and 10 years later, everyone’s happy, unless they’re dead. Or bored. (Actually, we have no idea if anyone is bored in “Paradise,” but we’ll get to that.)

This raises some concerns at the end of the hour, but before we get that far, we’re treated to the curiously rare sight of Sisko kicking some serious ass. It’s been a while since the commander has been allowed an opportunity to demonstrate just how strong he is, and Alixus proves a useful opponent. She’s a true believer, so convinced in the righteousness of her cause that she’s relaxed, confident, and immune to debate or discussion, which gives us a great chance for an immovable-object-meets-irresistible-force scenario. Sisko responds accordingly. He has Picard’s intellect, combined with Kirk’s will to action, and something else that’s entirely his own, and watching him refuse to budge to Alixus’ will is a great reminder of the character’s depth. The majority of the first and second season have seen Sisko in the diplomat/bureaucrat role, forced to negotiate the lines between warring cultures and keep the peace in an environment built for war. He’s done a good job of it, but it’s something of a relief to see this side of his personality again. Alixus suggests he take off his uniform; he refuses. Alixus’ son Vinod catches O’Brien poking around, and orders Sisko into the box as punishment; he endures. She lets him out of the box long enough to offer him water and rest if he’ll just give in to her demands; the son of a bitch limps back to the box and closes the door. In short, he’s a hero, even if his actions don’t change anyone’s mind or accomplish anything story-wise. O’Brien is the one who realizes the field is artificially generated, finds it, shuts it down, and then kicks Vinod’s ass. In terms of plot, Sisko serves mostly as a distraction. But both men are given moments to shine, and it’s Sisko’s stubborn conviction that has the most impact.

It’s frustrating, then, that the episode’s conclusion doesn’t quite live up to the rest of the hour. The last five minutes are an awkward fit: O’Brien tells the colonists the truth about the duonetic field, Alixus is unrepentant, and the others are basically okay with their life as it is. We don’t see Alixus get her comeuppance; sure, Sisko and O’Brien take her and her son with them when they go, but Alixus, who lied, betrayed, and let people die for her cause, doesn’t show any sign of distress. And why should she? She proved her point. Sisko may have stood up for himself, and O’Brien may have discovered her secret, but the colonists all choose to stay anyway. One of them basically says, “Well, she was bad, but we’re still happy, so whatever.”

This sticks in my craw some. It’s not that I object to the colonists enjoying the *Gilligan’s Island* lifestyle. The ambiguity here, the idea that a bad person can do some good in the world, is interesting and fits right in with this show. It’s just that the rapidity of the decision beggars belief, and speaks more of a need to wrap everything up before the closing credits more than honest human behavior. These people just found out their spiritual leader, the woman who’s been telling them how great they have it and locking them in cages when they do wrong, has been manipulating them and using them for 10

years. Shouldn't there be a period of anger or frustration? And why does only one member of the group make the decision for everyone else? With the field off, these people should be able to leave whenever they want, which means any immediate decision they make doesn't have to be a permanent one. But the instant universality of their desire to stay means the conflict building between Sisko and Alixus never pays off as thoroughly as it should. The whole scene is weirdly abrupt, and while it's fine to frustrate the audience by not giving it exactly what it wants, there should be some reason for the frustration beyond just, "Eh, that's all we got." It's the loudest sour note in an otherwise decent hour.

Stray observations:

- If the writers were pressed for time, they could've chunked some of the Dax/Kira subplot. It's fun, and I love watching those two characters bounce off each other, but most of it isn't completely necessary, and I would've rather had a more satisfying conclusion planet-side.
- I have absolutely no desire to live a technology-free life, and, apart from the fumbled ending, the episode's biggest problem is that it never manages to sell its "paradise" as anything more than a generic commune of pleasantness. But that's basically what I expected. However, the Sisko/O'Brien stuff is so great, I didn't mind bland so much.

"Shadowplay" (season 2, episode 16; originally aired 2/20/1994)

In which someone wakes up the Red King

"Paradise" is a classically structured television episode. By which I mean (he said, hoping no one would check his academic credentials), it's a script that could've played out roughly the same on the original series. There's one story, and all the characters who appear in the episode revolve around it. Once that story runs its course, there's no sense any of the events in the episode will have an impact on the rest of the season. This is focused, operating on a standard genre arc—we get a mystery (Who are all these strange people dressed like hippies?) and a conflict (How will Sisko and O'Brien get back to their ship?), the answer to the former feeds into the latter, until everything comes to a head and our heroes resolve the issue at hand and go about their way. It's efficient, and neat, and gets the job done.

"Shadowplay" has a similar structure. The difference being, in "Shadowplay," that structure is only part of the overall whole. The story which gives the episode its title follows Dax and Odo doing some exploring. They find strange omnicon particles, land on the planet with the apparent source to investigate, and find a small town where some of the locals have been disappearing. All the expected, familiar stuff here, and it's not too hard to imagine this sort of set-up taking over the entire hour. Except it doesn't. The Dax-Odo section of the episode has the most screentime, but the amount isn't so large as to overwhelm the adventures back on DS9. This is an hour driven by the ensemble, even though the ensemble is never all in the same place at the same time; this is an attempt to tell a bunch of small tales which add up to a picture of life going on much as it always does. [Star Trek: The Next](#)

Generation tried this more than once (“Data’s Day” comes to mind), but *DS9* is better suited to the idea, since it’s more willing to embrace serialization than *TNG* ever was. There are things which happen in this episode which will carry over as the show goes on. Not many of them, but still—Kira hooking up with Bareil isn’t going to be forgotten the next time the credits roll around, whether we’d like it to or not.

If I give too much emphasis to the structure here (and it’s not like “Shadowplay” is the first time *DS9* has ever played around with the form), it’s because there isn’t a whole lot to get into with the meat of the episode itself. Which is an odd response, when you consider the hour gives us apparent artificial intelligence, a major romantic relationship, and Jake’s decision to forego Starfleet and find his own path. And sure, I liked all of these elements. There’s a soothing, affable vibe to the episode as a whole, and while no grand theme connects these disparate threads (at least, none that I could find), all the stories are unified by a sense of low-conflict entanglements. When Dax and Odo arrive in the new town, the local sheriff (Colyus, the Protector, played by Kenneth Mars) points a gun at them. But once Dax and Odo explain who they are and why they’re visiting, any danger disappears. Hell, Odo makes it a point to demonstrate how easy it would be for him and Dax to leave at any moment. Unlike Sisko and O’Brien in the previous episode, they’re under no pressure to solve any mysteries. They hang out because they’re curious, and because Odo is defined by a need to restore. This makes sense from a character perspective, and the low-key approach is a nice change of pace, but it doesn’t exactly create much drive.

The same could be said for events back on the station. With Odo gone, Kira is on the warpath, determined to catch Quark (who is in full-blown Ferengi-creep mode) in the act, and while there’s certainly some tension as to just how he’ll escape this time, her surveillance is largely left in the background. She asks Bashir to spy on Quark for her, and Bashir is puppy dog eager to use some of the tricks Garak has taught him, but he doesn’t accomplish much. Most of Kira’s time in “Shadowplay” is spent dancing the awkward dance with Bareil, forming a romantic bond based on their genial discomfort around one another. It culminates in a face-rolling session which is roughly a quarter as hot as the one you’re imagining right now. Jokes aside, it’s not a cringe-inducing development, but it’s no reason to cheer, either. It simply exists. Then Kira realizes Quark got Bareil onto the station to distract her, and she goes off to tell Quark how foolish he was, even though you’ll notice she still doesn’t actually arrest him, despite her clear desire to do so.

Before my apathy overwhelms my writing, the other big plot on the station, which has Jake joining O’Brien for his very first job, is quite neat. For one thing, it’s a pay-off to a conversation Sisko and O’Brien had in “Paradise,” which demonstrates that even in its closed-off episodes, the show is working to create a textured, persistent world. Plus, I just love the idea of Sisko’s kid working on O’Brien’s crew. But the real point of interest here is Jake’s confession that he doesn’t love Starfleet the way Sisko does, and has no interest in following in the old man’s footsteps. O’Brien tells a story about his own past (I really want to see him playing a cello now), and urges Jake to tell his father the truth. Jake does, and Sisko is supportive. Again, low stakes, low drama, but it’s a wonderful look at people just being basically decent to each other, and it helps to strengthen our connection to these

characters. And it's just cool to see a father-son bond on television that isn't fraught with painful, humiliating conflict.

That leaves us with Odo and Dax back in the town with the mysterious disappearances. This would be the most obvious place for conflict. A strange place, creepy goings on, and a town elder who's hiding a secret? Add some thunder, lighting, and a few feet of coiled rope and you've got yourself a show. Only it doesn't play out that way. Colyus introduces our heroes to Rurigan (the great Kenneth Tobey), the town elder, and Odo quickly realizes he has something to hide. Rurigan's dying, too, which makes him the prime candidate for malfeasance; nothing left to lose, wanting to leave your mark before leaving this mortal coil, etc. But the solution is entirely benevolent. All those omnicon particles Dax was registering come off the generator which makes the town real. The whole thing is just a big hologram, and the reason people are disappearing is that the generator is malfunctioning. Dax and Odo explain this to the townsfolk, and ask their permission to turn off the system for long enough to fix it; when they do, all the buildings and people disappear except for Rurigan. He's the only real creature in the area; he came to the planet after the Dominion (there's that name again) took over his home and changed everything. So Rurigan recreated what he lost the only way he could.

This is all like a far less guilt-ridden induced version of [“The Survivors”](#) from *TNG*. There are implications which are only partly explored; Odo gives a passionate speech about how the people in the hologram are real enough to matter, and there's some question about just how sentient they are, but you get the impression that no one involved with the episode really wanted to go much further than that. And for what it is, it works. Odo's bond with a young girl who lost her mother is sweet, and there's something effectively melancholy in how it ends; Rurigan is still going to die soon, after all, and once he's gone, it will just be these imaginary/real people, wandering around, waiting for the generator to finally collapse.

There are good ideas and strong moments spaced throughout the episode. They just don't build to anything. The writers of *DS9* were experimenting and working towards a new kind of Trek, but they'd yet to find a way to match the demands of episodic storytelling with the needs of season-long arcs. The cast remains strong, and their world has become impressively rich. Now it's just a matter of finding the best way to use all these wonderful toys.

Stray observations:

- You know it's coming, but the moment Odo finally changes shape in front of the little girl is well-done. And I love the way he spins into a top, and then comes back out of it mid-spin. (That whole friendship had a very Data-esque feel to it.)
- I'm starting to appreciate Dax more and more. She may not quite work as a focal point, but she does a great job supplementing everyone else.
- Kenneth Tobey and Kenneth Mars in the same episode? Damn nifty.

Next week: Dax tries her hand at “Playing God,” and Quark struggles with the agonies of “Profit And Loss.”

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Playing God”/“Profit And Loss”Zack Handlen5/31/12 10:00AM**“Playing God”(season 2, episode 17; originally aired 2/27/1994)***In which Dax has to teach another Trill to seize the carp*

I haven't talked about it very much, but I'm starting to be quite fond of Dax. I never had huge problems with the character; I thought the first major episode focused on her wasn't very good, but it certainly was her fault. It's just, she hadn't quite come into focus in the same way that Sisko and Kira and the others had. (The only other character to suffer from this level of indeterminacy is Bashir, and he's gone through as much clarification as Dax has in the past season or so.) Everyone else had strong conflicts to play off. Sisko had a dead wife and a son to raise, Kira was dealing with her people's struggles and her own adjustments to a Cardassian free world. Odo's nature forced him to define himself as a matter of simply existing, and O'Brien was familiar from his time on [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#). Quark was a scoundrel. Hell, even Bashir fit a type: naive, arrogant genius trying to make his way in a world far more complicated than he'd expected to find. But Dax, apart from the whole worm thing, was just a nice, pretty lady who sometimes made fun of Sisko. She wasn't actively unpleasant, but there was potential, and every time a story would try and bring her center stage, that potential never came to fruition.

Although it suffers from a distinct lack of John Glover, “Playing God” is arguably the best Dax episode we've had so far, because her character arc is the strongest part of the hour. She takes in a potential candidate, Arjin, for joining, to assess his value as an initiate and, hopefully, push him in the right direction towards improving his chances. Jadzia went through this process years ago with Curzon Dax, and she hadn't enjoyed it; she's determined to make sure Arjin's experience is a more pleasant one.

And yet, she has doubts about him, and that's where the main character conflict of the episode arises. Tempers flare, but never get as far as broiling, and Jadzia is able to find a solution that makes everybody happy. It's a little on the easy side, and the weakest part of the episode is the fact that it builds and builds and then just kinda stops, but it's very cool to see Dax figuring things out for herself, and improving both a stranger's life and her own without having to compromise her ideals.

For this to work at all, though, Dax actually has to have ideals, and a philosophy, and part of what makes "Playing God" so refreshing is the discovery that Dax's personality has been developing nicely for quite some time now, all without me even noticing. At the start of the episode, Arjin is shocked to find his prospective mentor gambling with Ferengi, wrestling before breakfast, and singing songs with Klingons. None of which should come as a surprise to us; we've been seeing Dax ingratiate herself into station life from the beginning. But Arjin's horrified, Church Lady-esque reaction helps to clarify just what Dax is doing, especially in terms of her relationship to the symbiont. She's not partying or being irresponsible or disrespectful of the worm inside her (having a worm, or whatever you want to call it, is one of the greatest gifts a Trill can receive; we learn at the beginning that there are currently 5,000 applicants for the procedure, and only 300 symbionts available). She is, instead, fulfilling her part of the bargain, enriching both "Dax" and her own life experiences by embracing all the possibilities available to her. This is what makes the character interesting: she is, in her way, the most perfect expression of the original [Star Trek](#) ethos, the joy and wonder of exploration and discovery. Sure, she's not on a starship, but the station's proximity to the worm hole offers potential for science and cultural study, and what to outsiders may look like screwing around is—well, okay, part of it is just screwing around. But it's great to spend time with someone who has the requisite inner peace and patience to know the value of a rich, diverse life. Because of the experience of the symbiont, Jadzia's shyness and drive are mitigated, just as her youthful ambition and passion help, in turn, to enrich the Dax entity's journey. Plus, she clearly enjoys messing around with her friends. She's just cool. I dig that.

The episode follows two storylines. The adventures of Arjin and Dax are a good chance for Dax to do her thing, and for us to like her more; it also has a decent arc for a one-off character. Arjin isn't hugely memorable, but he gets the job done. This storyline is, in most respects, a predictable one. We could've seen Dax ultimately reject Arjin's candidacy, we could've seen him flame out, and we could even have seen Dax failing to live up to her wish to distinguish herself from Curzon. Any or all of these approaches could've worked, but the semi-familiarity of how things play out works to the episode's benefit. Sure, something more complex could've given the episode greater depth, but it works well enough that I'm not complaining.

Things get significantly stranger in the episode's other storyline, a sci-fi hook which introduces a Very Big Idea but then fails to scratch more than the surface. It's not really bad, per se, just a weird left turn in an otherwise highly traditional hour of television. One minute, we're watching Dax talk with Sisko about her difficulties with her new trainee; the next, she and that trainee manage to bring a bit of space detritus back through the wormhole, and before you know it, the detritus is a proto-universe and has started to rapidly expand, threatening to take the rest of the ship along with it. And as if this wasn't bad enough, Dax discovers evidence that the growing universe has intelligent life. Which puts

the station's already precarious position even into even further difficulty. Do they have the right, as Kira argues, to destroy a threat before it destroys them? Or do they have a responsibility, as Odo says, to protect potential intelligence, even when there's no immediate way to determine that intelligence exists? We started this episode with a character-specific conflict (Dax vs. the trainee), and while that conflict is still relevant for the whole hour, all of a sudden we're also dealing with great power versus great responsibility. There's an effort to make an abstract conflict more personal, seeing as how Kira and Odo's respective positions make perfect sense based on what we know of who they are. Odo, with his uncertain status in the world, wants to defend life for life's sake, while Kira, who has spent her whole life defending her home against aggressors, jumps immediately to the nuclear option.

These aren't terrible starting points for a debate, but given that they don't come up until over halfway into an hour that's far more focused on other subjects, it's hard to get too worked up about them. I'm not complaining that "Playing God" doesn't feature more hard-hitting genocidal debate; it's fine for what it is. But there's something unintentionally funny about casually throwing such a big topic into an otherwise unrelated episode. The crisis which eventually allows Arjin to show his stuff could've been just about anything. This show comes from a franchise with a history of tossing out just-plausible-enough technical crises to put its characters in danger. Hell, "Playing God" already has just such a crisis; the station is overrun with (ugly and charmingly fake) voles, a holdover from the Cardassian occupation. They're responsible for futzing around with the force field holding the proto-universe in check, but they could've easily chewed up some cord or gotten stuck in an engine. Instead of a final act where Arjin pilots a runabout to save the day, we get a final act where Arjin pilots a runabout to save the day while escaping from a rapidly expanding universe. It's not precisely bad, but it is distracting.

In the end, though, what matters most about this entry is how much it reveals about Dax—and how much of that revelation is understanding that she's basically doing fine. We've got our angsty characters, we've got our comic relief. Dax is somewhere in-between. Not because she's indistinct or problematic. She's just cool. That may not always lead to high drama or big laughs, but it's good to have around.

Stray observations:

- While experimenting with ways to get rid of the vole invasion. O'Brien tries a super-sonic pitch designed to drive them insane. Quark's reaction is really, really funny.
- Jake is in love with a Dabo girl. Sisko takes this as well as can be expected.

"Profit And Loss" (season 2, episode 18; originally aired 3/20/1994)

In which this may be the start of a beautiful friendship

The good news: Garak is back! The bad news: he's not the focus of this episode, and he's also kind of a dick. (Actually, that last isn't really bad news, but I didn't want to try for an "ugly news" joke. Seemed beneath me.)

In retrospect, it was probably inevitable. Quark runs an establishment of questionable virtue in a station next a wormhole, a place at the edge of the Federation where the law gets fuzzy, full of refugees and outcasts and the politically unfeasible. So he makes a perfect Humphrey Bogart stand-in when *Deep Space Nine* decides to do a charmingly straight-faced riff on *Casablanca*. Actually, no, stating it out like that doesn't make it seem inevitable, retrospect or no. It makes sense, sure, but the idea of Quark as a romantic lead in an episode which isn't overtly comedic blows the mind. But it works. "Profit And Loss" is a little silly around the edges, and it might have been more memorable if it had used Quark's Ferengi nature to poke more holes in its story's romantic pretensions, but it never comes across as forced or insincere. In its worst moments, it's generic; in its best, it shows us a side of a regular character which I'd never suspected, but somehow makes sense. Of course Quark has a romantic past. In a way, isn't romance all about greed? The transactional material is affection, not cash, but it's still lust however you look at it.

The set-up: a Cardassian ship comes through the wormhole in a state of distress. The station welcomes aboard Natima Long and her two "students," Rekelen and Hogue. She claims they were out on a scholarly survey when their ship ran afoul of a meteor storm, but when O'Brien goes to repair the damage, he discovers the evidence that Natima and her companions ran afoul of Cardassian fighters. (Kira's response—"Why would Cardassians fire on Cardassians?"—is dumb, although I guess she has a myopic perspective on her former foes.) While Sisko tries to get to the bottom of just what secrets the lady's trying to keep, Quark is overjoyed to have Natima back on the station. She used to be a reporter for the Cardassian News Service, and the two of them had a relationship which ended badly when Quark stole her computer codes to authorize some illegitimate payments. But now Quark is desperate to make it back to her, and if that means helping to sneak her students, who turn out to be potential revolutionaries in a way that's never exactly explained, off the station, so be it.

Complicating matters is the presence of Garak, who doesn't look too fondly of revolutionaries of any sort, and contrives to sell Natima and the others back to the Cardassian government in exchange for a release from exile. While Quark's lovelorn please are a big surprise, the discovery of the real reason why Garak hangs around DS9 is equally important—and while Garak still remains something of a gray area, "Profit And Loss" gives us perhaps our clearest glimpse of the erstwhile spy. For a good portion of the episode, he's working in the role of the ostensible villain; not the major bad guy (that would be Gul Toran, who is a.) an idiot and b.) doomed), but a definite obstacle to Natima and her charges shot at freedom. It's been a while since I've seen *Casablanca*, but I'm comfortable saying that Garak is in the Claude Rains role. (Actually, he shares it with Odo, but this isn't math.) At first, you aren't sure what side he's on, then it looks like he's going to be a problem, but in the end, it turns out he has a code that will help us arrive at a somewhat happy ending. While I'm curious as to just how Garak got himself exiled, it's the code that really interests me here. Garak believes in Cardassia. He's a true patriot who wants what's best for his home, and the reason he doesn't immediately support Natima and the others is, at least in part, because he doesn't have a whole lot of faith in revolutions. While there's no sense that he believes a military tribunal is really the best way to run things, it's better the

chaos of instability. He's a pragmatist, which fits in with everything we already knew about him, while adding a bit of clarity.

The same can be said for Quark's desperate passion for Natima. This is the second romance Quark has had on the show, and much as with ["Rules Of Acquisition,"](#) it's great to see him put into a traditional hero role. And even more so than in the earlier episode, he's really, really romantic. His relationship with Pel was mostly made up of jokes about how she was actually a woman in disguise, but with Natima, Quark has a history, and she treats him with the same disdain-bordering-on-passion that you'd expect of two humans in a similar situation. This could've been a gag, but "Profit And Loss" treats their history and connection with utmost sincerity; while Quark never betrays his nature (in that he's still largely self-interested), he's also completely honest about his feelings for the Cardassian woman, and the fact that she returns those feelings is actually plausible. Maybe it's the fact that both actors are buried under heavy make-up, but their overtures of affection basically work. Sure, Natima isn't the most vibrant personality. (Ingrid Bergman could get away with this because, y'know, she was Ingrid Bergman.) But for this episode to work, we have to believe Quark is seriously invested in trying to keep Natima around. And I did. I briefly wondered if he might be making some long con type of play, but he isn't. Armin Shimerman does a terrific job of finding still more room for feeling in Quark's character. The episode is never transcendent, but it holds together, and that's due in no small part to the actor's continued excellence.

Of course, all this mushiness doesn't mean Quark has lost all sense of proportion. Like Bogart, he wants his love to stay behind, but unlike Bogart, when the chips come down, Quark isn't willing to sacrifice his happiness, not even with the fate of Cardassia at stake. When Garak learns the Cardassian government has no plans of ending his exile, he shoots Toran and decides to let Natima and the others go. (It's a weird moment; Robinson makes it work, but it's almost as if he decides not to kill the rebels just to piss off the already vaporized Toran.) Quark thinks this means Natima will stay behind with him, but she has her own plans. So there's no "Here's looking at you, kid," although "So all I have to do to get you back is wait until Cardassia becomes a free and democratic society?" is a reasonable substitute. Both of this week's episodes are lightweight entries, not because they lack urgent drama and catastrophe, but because they vanish from the mind soon after watching. The stories are competent and thin, and the big impression I come away with is the depth of this show's ensemble, and how good the writers and actors are at adding personality to even the most generic script. And who knows. Natima claims Rekelen and Hogue (which sounds like the title of a really strange cop show) are the future of Cardassia, and while we don't know much about their philosophy, beyond their distrust of the military government, maybe they'll have some effect in the months to come. That's the other joy of this show; while the serialization isn't particularly intense, it's always present, and any tossed off line or background revelation might pay dividends down the line.

Stray observations:

- Lest I sound like I'm damning with faint praise, it is really, really difficult to correctly convey the right distinction between a good (or fine, or decent) hour of TV and a great one. Bad, I can

identify, great I can usually catch, but just a bit better than average—well, there’s certainly nothing wrong with that, and it’s an indication of the strength of a show at just how well it handles its middling episodes. But I want to save my hossanahs for when the show earns ‘em.

- The exchange between Garak and Quark in Garak’s shop is terrific. The two characters haven’t had a lot of screentime together, but it really works; I especially how Quark isn’t entirely sure what Garak is getting at, but understands well enough to know the right way to respond.
- Also great: Quark begging Odo to let Natima go. Really, any time these guys hang out is excellent.

Next week: Dax has to deal with a “Blood Oath,” and things get complicated with “The Maquis, part 1.”

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Blood Oath”/“The Maquis, Part I”Zack Handlen6/07/12 10:00AM**“Blood Oath” (season 2, episode 19; originally aired 3/27/1994)***In which a Trill’s gotta do with a Klingon’s gotta do*

Well, whaddya know: After waxing rhapsodic last week about the redemption of Dax, and how much I’ve come to enjoy her presence on the show, we get another episode with our favorite Trill in the spotlight. But while “Blood Oath” gives us Klingons, drunken boasting, oaths of vengeance, and an evil albino, it also brings back Serious Dax, who we haven’t seen in a while. Serious Dax is conceptually fine, and the idea behind the episode— which hangs on just how much obligation Jadzia has to follow through on Curzon’s debts—has potential, but Terry Farrell is better suited to gentle sarcasm, whimsy, and brief fits of melancholy than she is to the sort of internal struggle she has to weather here. Her conflict over honor never plays out with the intensity it requires, and after a certain point, her role in the episode becomes almost irrelevant to the main action; as so often happens with episodic television the real drama is with the one-off guest stars.

And yet, even with all that, “Blood Oath” still works. I’ve got a soft spot for Klingon theatrics, developed back in the trenches of [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#), and while I can’t buy Farrell as a warrior bad-ass, the ballad of Kang, Kor, and Koloth is as gripping as you’d expect. Because so much of the action is focused on non-*DS9* characters, “Blood Oath” isn’t as powerful as it could be, and the mournful tone also means the first half is somewhat lacking in energy. Yet it all builds to a gloriously violent climax, along with the expected character ambiguities which have come to be a hallmark of this series.

Actually, we should talk about those ambiguities, because Dax's decision to join with the Klingons on their vengeance quest, and Sisko's disapproval of her decision, are the only plot threads in the episode which are relevant to the ongoing series. Dax's soul-searching is surprising; I assumed she'd have no problem fighting, or killing if it came to that, and for all the hand-wringing she does, it's not like the Albino (I'm just going to capitalize that from now on, as I don't believe he ever gets a proper name) is a complex, multifaceted figure worthy of compassion. He's a child-murdering dick who deserves what's coming to him, so why the angst? And yet, while the episode doesn't spend much time on the question, it makes sense to raise the issue, and whether or not Farrell entirely sells her indecision (and she's not bad or anything) is less important than the fact that it gets attention at all. This isn't a world of easy good guys and bad guys, and even if the Albino is unquestionably a villain, that doesn't make the act of murder any less unsettling. While Dax the symbiont has probably killed before, Jadzia hasn't, and giving her some space to figure out if she's comfortable with the act deepens her character.

Likewise, though it's not a major plotline, Sisko's objection to her ultimate decision is an unexpected but interesting choice. At first, I wasn't quite sure what to make of it. It seems like an effort to create drama where there doesn't really need to be drama (Dax wasn't going to back down, and it's not like Sisko could've fired her or anything), and Sisko's moral stance wasn't something I would've seen coming. But the more I think about it, the more it works for me. It fits in with Dax's brief uncertainty about whether or not she should participate in the mission, because it takes an idea we could easily have taken for granted and tries to contextualize it. I've seen plenty of movies and TV shows with heroes killing villains, and I've cheered when those villains went down, but here, it's not as simple as "Point the gun, pull the trigger," or "Swing the Bat'leth, enjoy the blood spurts." Sisko is angry, and he's a fighter, but that doesn't mean he welcomes violence, and the Klingons' quest puts their desire for glory and revenge above the civilization and law and order which Sisko represents. From a certain perspective, Kang and the others' quest, in addition to Dax's need to be included, is foolish risk taking. Even worse, it's childish and destructive. Which isn't to say that we need to have lectures whenever anyone on the show picks up a weapon, but Sisko's perspective on the storyline is valuable even if he doesn't change much. It's a reminder that there's a cost for everything.

As for the Klingon half of the episode, it's all about honor and glory, which is basically the only things these Klingon stories are ever about. The Albino (and for real, you could do a drinking game with the number of times that word comes up, always with a hissing, impassioned hatred; it's weird before we get the back-story, because for a while, it sounds like "albino" is somehow an inherently despicable trait, like "Nazi" or "zoologist") killed each of their first-born sons as retaliation for them trying to stop his wicked ways, so now they've sworn to get their vengeance, only they aren't as young as they used to be. The first one we meet, Kor, is a drunken buffoon bashing his brains out in one of Quark's holosuites; then Koloth, the gray-haired intellectual, shows up; and finally Kang arrives, the leader of the group and the one who brought everyone together for one last score. These are archetypes, and while Koloth suffers a bit from being less bombastic than Kor and less conflicted than Kang, all three still serve their purpose. Kang is the most complex. Late in the episode, Dax discovers that the Klingon

was lying about how he learned of the Albino's whereabouts; the murderer actually contacted Kang himself, ostensibly because he wanted a clean end to all the running, more probably because he wanted to lure his foes into a trap. Because Kang isn't an idiot, he realizes he and his friends are marching into their doom (which is why he tries to stop Dax from tagging along), but a good death is better than an empty life. At least it is until Jadzia convinces him that it's still worth trying to survive.

Sadly, Kang dies anyway. That's the kind of story he and his friends are in, and however much Dax tries, there are rules for this sort of thing. Koloth gets gutted, and the Albino gets the drop on Kang, although the latter is still able to find enough strength to kill his enemy before Dax is forced into doing it herself. In a way, that saving throw is representative of the conclusion as a whole. Kang wanted a clean death, and despite betraying his friends, that's what he gets; sure, he earns it by telling the truth before the final fight, but it's still something of a let down after all that buildup to see the fight play out exactly as expected. The action is more than we usually get on the show, and there's definitely something to be said for watching Dax and a trio of senior citizens running roughshod over a bunch of anonymous stormtroopers. But after all Dax's soul-searching, when faced with the big decision—to kill or not to kill—the choice is conveniently taken out of her hands. (She might have killed one of the guards earlier, but they were all wearing face masks, so they don't count.) The Klingons go in expecting to fight and most likely die, and that's exactly what they get. The closest we get to a ragged edge is the silent exchange between Dax and Sisko when she returns to the station. He's still not happy with what she's done, but he's not going to punish for her it; it'll just lay there between them, a part of their friendship they'll never entirely be able to get beyond. "Blood Oaths" works on the basic level an hour of *DS9* needs to work. It tells a story with consistent internal logic, and, surprising or not, the Klingons' arc does what it's supposed to. (I especially liked that Kor is the only one of the trio to survive. That just makes sense.) But it's too formal and too solemn to really rouse up the blood, and the most intriguing aspects of the plot are put to the side in favor of keeping things as straightforward as possible.

Stray observations:

- It's fun to see Michael Ansara (who plays Kang) on the show. To me, he'll always be a faux Native American from [The Manitou](#) and [Day Of The Animals](#).
- We also get another glimpse into Curzon's past: He met Kang while serving as a negotiator, and he was smart enough to know the best way to a Klingon's heart is to piss them off.
- Several commenters have pointed out that I managed to overlook arguably the coolest angle of the episode: the three Klingons were all first introduced as villains in the original [Star Trek](#). Kor (John Colicos) is from ["Errand Of Mercy"](#); Koloth (William Campbell) is from ["The Trouble With Tribbles"](#); and Kang is from ["Day Of The Dove."](#) This is definitely something I should have caught, and I apologize for missing it; my only excuse is that the episode doesn't really give any indication that the characters have a history beyond what we learn from Dax, and it's been a few years since I watched the earlier episodes. As to whether or not this changes my take on "Blood Oath," that's trickier to parse. While I can see the argument that bringing back old bad guys (played by the same actors who originated the roles, no less) makes the trio more

complicated than I initially assumed, this is really more of a clever nod to fans than it is an effective storytelling device. Kor, Koloth, and Kang were fun on *TOS*, but each only appeared in a single episode, and old *Trek* wasn't particularly concerned with establishing continuity or strong character arcs. If this hour had been more concerned with establishing its ties to the past, well, that would be one thing. As is, while knowing the back-story helps me like the episode a little more, it doesn't change a good outing into a great one.

“The Maquis, Part I” (season 2, episode 20; originally aired 4/24/1994)

In which old friends and old enemies switch places

It must be exhausting to be Benjamin Sisko. He's stuck in an impossible situation; as a representative of the Federation, he has to try and keep open relationships with the Bajoran and Cardassian governments, two races which, at best, cordially detest each other, as well as offer what support and assistance he can to Bajor without directly interfering. His space station is situated next to a wormhole, which means he and his staff have to deal with a constant influx of dozens of different species with different needs, expectations, and appendages. The people work for him all basically like him, but they have their own goals, and when they disagree with him, they aren't afraid to share their feelings. He's raising a son as a single parent, and while Jake is a good, trustworthy kid, he's also a teenager, and that means hormones and rebellion and Dabo girls. And as if that weren't enough, he's also a central figure in a religion he barely understands, a Chosen One who, had he a choice, would've very much preferred not getting picked. It's no wonder he's often short with people; it's remarkable he doesn't spend his whole day shouting.

“The Maquis, Part I” isn't really about how lousy Sisko's job is, but it's hard to ignore all the plates he has to keep spinning throughout the episode. The plot, which centers on a potential rift between Cardassian and human settlers, is fairly complicated, and we won't find out the truth of what's really going on until next week; for right now, the biggest impression I walk away with from this episode is just how much it can suck to be Sisko. But while it's no fun for him to be running around the galaxy with Gul Dukat, as well as discovering one of his oldest friends just might be a traitor, it's great that we get another chance to see the man in action. Admittedly, he doesn't truly succeed here, and he spends most of the hour struggling to keep his irritation in check, but while that lacks the drama of his stand in “Paradise,” it has its own pleasures. And it's not all frustration, either. “The Maquis” introduces Calvin Hudson (the great Bernie Casey), a pal of Sisko's, and allows the two men a couple of scenes to just sit around and chat about how the time keeps flying. Generally, Sisko saves his moments of warmth for his son, so it's nice to see him relaxing with someone else. Sure, the real reason for these scenes is to give the reveal at the end (Calvin is the leader of the Maquis, the revolutionary group responsible for the attacks that catalyze this story) more weight, and that's the oldest trick in the book. But there's something to be said for a reminder of the day-to-day lives of characters we generally only see in moments of crisis. The two actors have good chemistry together, and I'm looking forward to seeing the fallout of Calvin's betrayal.

Unfortunately, “The Maquis” is split between two focal points. On the one side, the good side, we have Sisko running around trying to figure out what’s really on going on and what he needs to do to stop it, and on the not really good at all side, we have Quark trying to seduce a Vulcan woman who wants to buy weapons off him. Sakonna, the Vulcan, is part of the Maquis; we first see her exchanging significant glances with the man who plants a bomb on a Cardassian ship at the start of the episode, and later, she helps kidnap Gul Dukat. So knowing that the Maquis are buying lots of weapons for their fight is useful, sort of, but for the most part the scenes between Quark and Sokanna are padding, done to help ensure that this episode is long enough to justify the two-parter status. If these scenes were entertaining, or at the very least passable, I wouldn’t object too much; unlike a lot of *TNG* two-part episodes, “The Maquis” is taking on a story, and a situation, complex enough that it deserves some breathing room. It’s just that Quark’s lechery has never been one of the character’s best traits, and the Ferengi comes off as a creepy perv, in a context where he’s clearly supposed to be seen as winningly roguish. The whole sequence is off-putting, and, despite Shimerman’s efforts, Quark is the reason why.

Enough of that. While Calvin is the big guest, “The Maquis” also sees the return of one of the show’s recurring players, Gul Dukat. Dukat arrives on the station after a Cardassian freighter is destroyed under suspicious circumstances. He lets himself into Sisko’s room unannounced, starting their conversation off on the wrong foot (it’s hard to get more wrong than, “Where’s my son? Did you do anything to him?”), but the two manage to work together long enough to turn their plot into a short, delightful, buddy comedy. Dukat insists that Sisko come with him to the colonies which are the source of all the trouble, and Sisko agrees, although he makes sure Dukat doesn’t get access to the controls of the runabout. The more we see of Dukat, the more I appreciate his presence; he’s smart and ruthless and charming, and that makes him a formidable foe, and a great tool for the writers. He and Sisko play off each other well, and what makes their relationship work in this episode is the way Dukat is more or less telling the truth. A team-up between two unlikely allies is always a good starting place for drama, and while Dukat tends to dominate the scenes they share together (mostly because he has more information, and his nature allows him to be more flamboyant than Sisko), the dynamic is an exciting one, and helps get us through what amounts to a lot of place-setting.

Really, that’s what most of “The Maquis” is: making sure the audience understands the situation and everyone’s in the right position before lighting the fuses. As such, and as is so often the case with two part episodes, it’s hard to judge exactly how well this one works on its own. But while it’s clear that the main point of the hour is building up a conflict in order to get us to the cliffhanger, with Dukat the captive of the Maquis and Sisko realizing Calvin knows a lot more about all of this than he’s let on, there’s still enough excitement to keep this from being a complete drag. As mentioned, *The Adventures Of Sisko And Dukat* is terrific, and arguably more impactful than Sisko’s conversations with Cal. The latter creates a temporary bond, but the former works to strengthen a working relationship which will presumably last for seasons to come. The other highpoint of the hour is the “discussion” between the human and Cardassian colonists in the demilitarized zone. Both sides are looking to force the other around to their point of view, and it’s fun to watch how thoroughly inappropriate the

Cardassian approach—which is to lecture and condescend your foes into submission—is in these circumstances. At one point, the head Cardassian busts out a video recording of a man confessing to the bombing that starts the hour, as though this somehow resolves the issue. Sure, those of us in the audience know that the confessor is the guilty man (hell, even the people hearing the confession know this, despite their outrage), but the assumption that being “right” will somehow resolve the issue is oddly naïve for such a calculating people. It makes perfect sense, though. The Cardassian colonists are operating from a position of assumed power. They’re so used to having control and the necessary power to enforce it, that the idea that their word might not be good enough cause to end the discussion is probably a foreign concept.

Best of all is that, as arrogant as they are, it looks like Sisko is going to have to end up defending the Cardassians from terrorist forces. That’s great conflict right there, and while it won’t make Sisko’s day any easier, it means we have something to look forward to next week. In terms of cliffhangers, nothing that happens at the end of this episode is all that concerning. I doubt Dukat is going to die (if they were going to kill him, they’d have done so immediately), and Sisko, Bashir, and Kira don’t appear in any real danger at the hands of the Maquis. Plus, Cal’s involvement with the group means we’re going to have a lot of justification monologues next week, and lots of slippery moral justifications for excessive behavior. But we also know Sisko is going to have to find a way out of this that doesn’t start a war. Seeing how that plays out is something to look forward to.

Stray observations:

- If you’ve been following my *Trek* reviews, you may remember we’ve seen the Maquis before, in *TNG*’s [“Preemptive Strike.”](#) I quite liked that episode, which was one of *TNG*’s few forays into the sort of moral gray area *DS9* calls home; surprisingly, it aired after this two-parter, which explains why everyone seems so surprised that the group exists.
- Sokanna has never heard of the Rules Of Acquisition, which makes her not very bright for a Vulcan. (Also, she keeps mentioning how logical her behavior is. Maybe she’s hiding something, or maybe the writers just want to make sure where Vulcans fall on the Alien Characteristic Chart.)
- Cardassians consider joy a vulnerability. Dukat on Sisko: “Of all the humans I’ve met, you strike me as the most joyless and the least vulnerable.” (I wish more of the episode had focused on the two of them hanging out. Dukat is just delightful.)
- There’s a scene late in the episode with the show’s main ensemble standing around in Ops, sniping at each other over the crisis. It’s the kind of scene I can imagine people who took issue with the show’s darkness objecting to, as it has our heroes trying and failing to work effectively as a group. (There’s also an argument between Sisko and Kira, but it’s not like that’s a surprise.) Maybe I’ve been spoiled by far colder dramas, but to me, the shouting just shows how tightly bound these people really are to one another. They’re a family, and families fight.
- **Next week:** We need to talk about Calvin in “The Maquis, Part II,” and walk through the garden with “The Wire.”

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Maquis Part II”/“The Wire”Zack Handlen6/14/12 10:00AM**“The Maquis, Part 2” (season 2, episode 21; originally aired 5/1/1994)***In which Sisko loses a friend, and a friend loses his uniform deposit*

Through both parts of this story, I’ve been trying to figure out why I’m not more invested in the outcome. This has all the elements I tend to pick out for praise: complex world-building, a morally challenging conflict, high stakes, and characters forced into conflict with people they care about. And yet, all of this lacked the energy and passion of the show’s best early episodes (one of which is coming up next). This could be due in some part to my own predilections; while I admire ambition, I tend to lose interest in stories in which the conflict is overly abstract, as it is here, despite the efforts to personalize the issue with the presence of Sisko’s old friend. But I think it comes down to a desire to tell bigger, more impactful stories without a willingness to entirely follow through. As two-parters go, this serves its purpose, and the second half has some excellent moments. It’s just, without any real consequence, the struggles we watch come off as slightly toothless. No one we care much about dies, or even changes their position. I understand why Calvin was brought in, but the reveal that he’s working with the Maquis doesn’t exactly sting, especially in comparison to Ensign Ro’s ultimate decision in **“Preemptive Strike.”** The politics of Sisko’s situation are fascinating, but only if the show can find a way to translate concept into tangible reality. As it is, we see a bunch of humans running around in generic *Trek* clothing acting aggrieved and shouting at each other, and then they lose. It’s hard to get all that worked up over their plight.

Sisko is troubled by it, though, and his inner turmoil is one of “The Maquis, Part II”’s highlights. It’s easy to listen to the various grievances on the Cardassian and human sides and not care a whole lot;

Cardassians are evil dicks, and we only see the humans after they're past their breaking point, so they're already stuck in a feedback loop of self-righteousness. But it gets to Sisko, and the fact that it bothers him means it matters more to us. As seems to happen in these big two-parters, external crisis helps serve to clarify and strengthen our understanding who Sisko is and what he stands for, and Avery Brooks is always excellent when the material gives him the opportunity. Last week, he spent most of his time seething and trying to get caught up on events as a problem threatened to spin out of control. This week, he's still angry, but now he's going to do something about it. He rescues Gul Dukat from his captors, he forces an agreement to stop weapon shipments to the Cardassian colonists, and he prevents a major Maquis attack, all of it through his own initiative and will. There was never any doubt that Sisko was right for his job, but after watching him get mocked by Dukat and fooled by his friend in the first part of this story, it's gratifying to watch him make things work out in the best way he can. Not that any of it makes him feel much better. The show has given us situations without easy solutions before, and it always makes for effective drama; not only is it more realistic (which isn't necessarily a good thing), it also leaves room for a more complicated response. Sisko sets out to prevent a war, and he accomplishes his goal. That doesn't mean he's happy about it. He sympathizes with the Maquis, and the fact that the episode's climactic battle has him clashing with the colonists (as well as with his old friend) can't feel right. As always, Starfleet is no help ([Star Trek: The Next Generation](#) fans will recognize the steely uselessness of Admiral Nechayev in her brief guest appearance), and, apart from Kira, no one is all that impressed at how ably Sisko balances the demands of his conscience and circumstance. But it gives us a reminder of just how suited Sisko is to the role which has been forced upon him. He can give impassioned speeches about the plight of the Maquis in one scene, and then face them down without blinking in another. He is not to be fucked with.

The other highlight of the hour is once again the presence of Gul Dukat. Can I make a confession? I really like the Cardassians. I'm not sure I'd want to share a planet with them (or under them, as it were), but I'm a lot more fascinated by Cardassian politics than I am by the Bajorans'. When it comes to Bajor, the joy is in the individuals. Individual, really: Kira is terrific, and while she hasn't had as much to do this season as she did in the first, she remains a vital, exciting element of the show. But the rest is, if not awful, then at least not all that thrilling. I've enjoyed the government squabbles and Vedek maneuvering, but at the same time, when Bajoran-centric episodes pop up, it sometimes feels like I'm being forced to eat my vegetables.

This is not the case with the Cardassians. Not every Cardassian storyline has been gold, but their culture is more clearly defined (Bajor tends to be "sort of religious"), and, because they're the bad guys, they get to be more aggressive and trickier and, on the whole, more fun to watch. Garak is the show's best non-ensemble character (and one of the show's best characters period), while Dukat continues to blossom into a reliably fascinating opponent, and even the incidental Cardassians we've run into have been striking and creepy as needed. While Bajor struggles to rebuild and find its voice, Cardassia gets to run around forming secret plots to undermine the Federation and manipulate its old enemies, while operating under a government which could charitably be referred to as "strict." If either of these places were real, I'd know which one I'd want to visit (hint: it's the one without

oppressive restrictions of personal freedom and enforced devotion to the state), but they aren't, and that means I'd much rather hear about Cardassian aggression than Bajoran passivity.

Thankfully I'm in luck, because Gul Dukat gets, if anything, even more screen time in part two than he did in the first half of the story. First we see him mocking his captors for their basic inability to torture information out of him (Sakonna tries for a mind-meld, but Dukat manages to block her). Then, when he learns from Sisko that the Cardassian government has thrown him to the wolves, he teams up with the DS9 personnel to help find a resolution to the situation that won't end in outright war. As entertaining as the Gul is throughout, the real fun here is watching him and Sisko play off each other again, and the smart way the episode uses Dukat to both demonstrate Sisko's cunning, and show where he draws the line. After watching the Cardassian run rings around him last week, Sisko is able to force Dukat to do his bidding this time around; the Cardassian government (in the form of Legate Parn) attempts to pin the weapon shipments on the kidnapped Dukat, which means the Gul doesn't look quite as sharp as he once was. Add to this the fact that Sisko goes out of his way to rescue the man, in a situation where, were their positions reversed, Dukat would've almost certainly left him to rot, gives Benjamin a curious sort of edge. It's easy to mistake decency for cowardice or weak-will, but Sisko demonstrates how committed he is to maintaining his own ideals by sticking to them as much as possible. He rescues Dukat (which is part a diplomatic coup, but also just the right thing to do), and, when faced with his old friend Calvin, chooses to let the other man go after preventing him from reaching his objective. Dukat views this as a weakness, because of course he would; to a Cardassian, the only good enemies are dead ones, and the only good friends are the ones you haven't caught yet. But Sisko is in an impossible position, and while Cal himself never registers all that strongly, the grief his betrayal inspires does. Sisko's decision not to kill his friend feels earned; he makes the decision, one suspects, as much for the sake of his own soul as for Cal.

It's too bad, then, that the rest of the episode doesn't live up to its best moments. As usual in the second season, there's nothing embarrassing; in reuniting Quark and Sakonna, the hour even manages to partially redeem the pair's creepy encounters in ["Part I,"](#) as Quark uses logic to point out to Sakonna the inherent stupidity of her choices. Yet Sakonna isn't much of a character, and as fun as it is to see Quark turn Vulcan logic against her, it's hard not to wonder just what the point is. Including a Vulcan with the Maquis should have some kind of meaning, but it doesn't, and we never get a strong sense of how she got caught up in all this mess. A small criticism, to be sure, but it's relevant to the episode as a whole, because it's with the Maquis themselves that the show's ambition fumbles. We're told the Federation colonists are suffering under Cardassian rule, we're informed that this suffering drove a section of them to form a group capable of fighting back, but none of this back-story ever lands. The episode gives us Calvin as a sort of all-purpose symbol, figuring both as reminder to Sisko of his Starfleet past and his duties, as well as giving us a supposed emotional connection to the Maquis. But it's not enough, and Calvin himself is never more than a generic figure of betrayal. The biggest sin this story commits is spending too much time telling us to care instead of forcing us to. It avoids being a slog because it has some good ideas and good performances, but it's hard to escape the malaise of a missed opportunity.

Stray observations:

- If I was grading these, the sight of Odo turning his arm into a tentacle to grab one of the Maquis would've definitely been worth half a letter grade at least.
- "On Cardassia, the verdict is always known before the trial. And it's always the same."—Dukat, explaining the Cardassian legal system.
- Dukat: "Commander, thank you for coming to my rescue." Sisko: "I'm sure you would have done the same for me." Then he laughs.
- Dukat: "You disappoint me." Sisko: "Don't expect me to lose any sleep over it."

"The Wire" (season 2, episode 22; originally aired)

In which Garak goes way down in the hole

I tend to take people at their word. It's not because I'm honest or because I'm a better person or whatever. It's because, for me, the idea of expressed self-identity is so crucial to how I view myself in the world that I can't imagine someone pretending to be someone else. I can understand the concept; I can understand trying to cover up a crime or trying to make yourself look better. But intentional, generalized obscurity will always surprise me. In real life, this can be painful; in fiction, it can be superb. Although even then, the balance is tricky, because fictional characters whose motives shift too often expose themselves as tools of the writers, useful primarily because they fit any narrative hole. This happens on TV shows a lot, although I'll be damned if I can come up with a specific example. (Much as I loved the series, half the cast of [Battlestar Galactica](#) seems to fit in this category at various times.) Character complexity is a welcome, and frequently powerful, concept. Character convenience is not. Which is just one of the reasons I'm so impressed by "The Wire," which is just plain terrific. The episode hinges on Garak, and, more to the point, the multiple layers of deceit and obfuscation Garak has built up around himself over the course of his life. By the end of the hour, the details of the former (?) spy's past are present, but obscure, like words read in a dream. This could have been immensely frustrating, and yet, as it's handled, it's entirely consistent with what we do know about Garak as an individual. More, even though I can't say for sure how he was exiled from his home planet, you get enough of the story that you feel like you know the important parts.

Another great angle to the episode, this one slightly more subtle: it gives Bashir something worthy of his talents. I mentioned before that Dax was the closest thing to a problem character the show had (but she's great now), but Bashir gets off on a technicality. While poor Dax had to suffer through supposedly character-centric episodes which had no idea what they wanted to say about her, or what she was supposed to be, Bashir is mostly on the sidelines. He'll get screentime, but I don't think we've had a specifically Bashir-centered hour on the show; or if we have, it's never done much to define him. He's a smart doctor who loves the ladies, he's maybe a little too earnest, and he wishes O'Brien would like him more. Oh, and for a while, he really wanted to sleep with Dax, but he seems to have accepted that probably won't happen. Nothing wrong with any of this, but compared to the rest of the group,

he needs some kind of push, some more active choices to render him specific. For a while, Bashir seemed to be on the show because the station needed a doctor, so why not. While that explains his presence from a plot standpoint, he needs more to do, something to distinguish him so that when he's in a room with other characters, he's not just someone speaking necessary expository dialogue. ("The Maquis, Part II" is a good example of this function: Bashir pops up in staff meetings and on away missions, but unless he's providing medical commentary, his lines all sound like anyone could have said them.)

Bashir's friendship with Garak has always been one of the most interesting things about him, and "The Wire" uses that friendship to great effect. In the past when we've seen the two of them together, Garak has always served as the wiser, more powerful figure. He knows more about what's going on than Bashir, and his guidance is necessary to keep the doctor moving forward. Their roles are somewhat reversed in this episode, however. In the cold open, the two are wanting to have lunch together when Garak is overcome by an attack of—something. Bashir expresses concern, and Garak puts him off, but the doctor isn't fooled. Displaying the sort of pushy benevolence which appears to be common practice among Starfleet personnel (it must have something to do with the sense of entitlement that comes from not needing money to do anything), Bashir starts asking questions and looking into Garak's medical records. He and Odo spy on Garak making arrangements with Quark to try and purchase some high level, classified Cardassian bio-technology. Finally, when the attacks become too severe, Bashir confronts the tailor, and that's when things get really interesting.

It's also why this episode is a great one for Bashir. I wasn't a huge fan of his early aggressiveness, if only because the idea of someone forcing you to accept their tender care always makes me uncomfortable; but viewed in another light, he's just doing what Garak would have suggested, had the situation not involved him directly. Regardless of the ethics of the doctor's initial investigations, by the time the true nature of Garak's problem becomes clear (or as clear as it ever gets), Bashir has demonstrated just what kind of man he really is. Like McCoy on the original [Star Trek](#), Bashir is a doctor, and treating the sick takes precedence over everything else. This may seem like a simple (and obvious) bit of characterization, and unlike what we learn about Garak, "The Wire" offers no huge surprises with regard to Bashir's soul. Yet his determination, patience, and perseverance help establish his place on the show. We've seen signs of these qualities before, but they seem especially important in the face of the endless permutations of Garak's lies, and Bashir's steadfast approach helps provide the episode with its emotional core. No matter what the revelations, only one thing matters to him: healing the sick. The simple, unshakable morality helps to explain why Garak (who is tricky and clever and not to be trusted) puts so much stock in Bashir's opinion of him. Late in the episode, Garak asks Bashir's forgiveness, even without entirely confessing what he wants absolution for—and the gesture comes across as one of the few purely sincere ones the Cardassian makes in the entire hour. It also serves to define Bashir. No one else on the station could've offered Garak the forgiveness he craves, not without caveats or anger or incomprehension. Yet Bashir takes his friend's hand, and accepts it all. He even risks his life by going out to meet Garak's former spy boss to get some crucial information. (That the boss is entirely pleasant and helpful makes perfect, deeply creepy sense.)

As for just what he's accepting... "The Wire" is my favorite episode of *DS9* since "[Duet](#)," and it shares with that earlier entry a series of shifting understandings. Comparatively early, we learn that Garak has an implant in his brain, so we think, like Bashir, it must be some sort of punishment device. But that's not exactly right; Garak explains to the doctor that he received the implant when he was given a certain piece of information during his work for the Cardassian spy organization known as the Obsidian Order, information so crucial that he needed to be able to absolutely guarantee he would not reveal it to others, not even under torture. The wire in his brain is designed, in moments of great stress and suffering, to send waves of endorphins into his brain, literally translating pain into pleasure. This renders any "enhanced interrogation techniques" ineffective, but it also gives him access to a potentially addictive substance locked into cerebral cortex. Garak is a creature of discipline and focus, but his exile from Cardassia has become more and more agonizing for him, turning his time on Deep Space Nine into daily sessions of misery and despair. So he started triggering the device in his brain to help him get through the day, and that helped for a while, only he had to use it more and more often, and then it went haywire and now he's hooked on something that will kill him, and soon.

It's a brilliant concept, one that manages to subvert our expectations while at the same time living up to them. Garak has a wire in his head? Oh, it must be some sort of evil Cardassian punishment—but it isn't. It's something worse. Just the idea of modifying one's neural chemistry to turn agony into ecstasy is unsettling, and it fits in beautifully with all we know about Cardassia and its ways. Everything comes down to control; everything is about reducing weakness, and conforming the individual to the needs of the state. If something as fundamental as the body's way of warning itself of injury can be changed, even reversed, there's no real limit to what they can do next. Eventually, $2 + 2$ really will equal 5.

The episode doesn't end there, either. Garak tells Bashir he was exiled for destroying a passenger transport with a high-level Cardassian official's daughter on board, almost daring Bashir to leave in disgust. But the doctor stays on, convincing the tailor he needs to go cold turkey or die. This gives Bashir another chance to prove his worth, first defending Garak against Odo's curiosity (since Garak was part of the Obsidian Order, Odo assumes he's either responsible for some unsolved murders on his books, or else he knows who was responsible), and then standing by his friend as he suffers through the agonies of withdrawal. Garak doesn't make this process easy, either. We learn another version of *How I Got Exiled From The Only Home I'll Ever Know*, only this time he says he allowed some Bajoran children to escape during an interrogation, because he couldn't bear to see them suffer. Later, he'll suggest he tried to frame this decision on an aid named Elim, except it turns out that Elim is, in fact, Garak's first name, so what does all of this mean? Is he a murderer? Well, yes, he's a murderer, but was killing the wrong person the reason he was sent away? Or was it some momentary show of compassion that doomed him?

I'm not exactly sure, and yet, it's not hard to understand just who Garak is after watching this. The details matter less than the way he tells them, the self-loathing so thick in his voice it drowns out his trademark chirrupy sarcasm. Imagine you've spent your whole life in a totalitarian state, and you've devoted that life to advancement, obedience, and devotion. And also imagine you are very, very good

at your work. You rise in position, you find a coveted role in the halls of power and you are groomed to one day rise to be the highest in the land, and every day, you feel something like a conscience warning you to stop. Or maybe you don't. Maybe you're so committed to the glory of all that you don't have time for morality or decency or implications. Only one day, something happens. Some mistake, some slip in your otherwise perfect control, and that's all it takes. Or maybe you're not even the one who makes the mistake; maybe it's a co-worker. Either way, it's the end of your rise, the end of your golden-child status, and without apology, you are sent on your way, so despised by the mentor who once loved you that he hopes you live a long, miserable life. You're sent away to a place where half the people hate you, and the rest don't trust you, and you brood as the hours and days pass, because you can't understand what happened. The behavior which threw you into exile is the one thing you ever did that the people around you would praise you for, and yet embracing it, embracing that minor miscalculation of mercy, would mean abandoning everything in your life which has meaning. So you're crafty, and you're a little wiser than you were, but you're still trapped, because you're compromised no matter which direction you turn.

That's probably not exactly it. At the very least, the revelation that "Elim" never existed (at least not in the way Garak describes) shakes up the narrative. I think that's the spirit of it, though, and the idea that the Obsidian Order outcast is screwed coming and going makes sense to me. I'm not sure if we'll ever get a clearer picture of why Garak is in the position he's in, but either way, I'm happy. We know enough about his past now to know why his smiles always seem just a little too wide, and to get a sense of who's hiding behind all that casual conversation.

Stray observations:

- You want to know the difference between a good episode and a great one? Okay, there are a lot of different answers to that, but for one: in a good episode, Garak's explanation about his brain implant would've been the climax. Here, it's a signal that the games have begun in earnest.
- Garak trying to convince Bashir of the delights of Cardassian literature gives a nice insight into their relationship. (And into Garak.)
- "My dear doctor, they're all true." "Even the lies?" "Especially the lies."

Next week: Kira and Bashir have an adventure in "Crossover," and Vedek Winn returns to point fingers in "The Collaborator."

[Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Crossover”/“The Collaborator”](#)[Zack Handlen](#)[6/21/12 10:00AM](#)**“Crossover” (season 2, episode 23; originally aired 5/15/1994)***In which Kira and Bashir have adventures through the looking glass*

“Mirror, Mirror” is one of the best episodes of the original Star Trek. While it lacks the emotional weight of “The City On The Edge Of Forever” or the nail-biting tension of “The Doomsday Machine,” the story of Captain Kirk’s trip to an alternate reality where Everything He Knows Is Wrong hits the perfect sweet spot between high concept and camp. It should be ridiculous: the crew of the *Enterprise* is evil! Superior officers enforce obedience via torture! The agony booth! Spock has a goatee! To be honest, the episode *is* ridiculous, which is also why it’s so fun. There’s a crazy energy to the episode that the original series so often had, combined with just enough sincerity and genuine creepiness to keep it all from being a joke, and it all culminates in a surprising, and yet entirely explicable, twist: Evil Spock isn’t actually evil. At least, he still operates on the basis of logic and deduction, and by the end of the hour, Kirk is able to convince him that it would be better for Evil Spock and the rest of his kind if they tried to murder each other just a little bit less. Kirk and his friends then return home, comfortable in the knowledge that in their brief time on the other side, they’ve managed to make a difference, and even if they didn’t, it’s not like those people are going to write them or anything.

The Mirror Universe is never mentioned again in *TOS*, nor does it ever come up on Star Trek: The Next Generation. The concept is striking enough to be memorable, but so outlandish that I wouldn’t have expected it to return, because it seems so difficult to sustain. Parallel universes, sure, but a parallel universe in which all the characters we know and love are bondage fetishists? That’s a bit much. The idea of the *TNG* cast trying to maniacally laugh their way through an homage makes me very

uncomfortable. (Imagine an entire planet populated with Lores.) But “Mirror” is well-constructed enough that its apparent absurdities have surprising depth, and “Crossover” makes good use of those depths, giving Kira and Bashir a chance to visit a place where up is down, black is white, and cats and dogs co-sign the lease. And while it takes a little stretching to buy into all of this, the effort is worth it. This is a cast just aching to get nasty.

Well, except for poor Bashir, who spends most of the episode doing hard labor. Maybe it’s punishment for his obnoxious behavior in the cold open, where he seems hellbent on undoing all the growth he’s managed in the past season or so. Regardless of the reason, this is a Kira episode, as is the other half of this week’s double feature, “The Collaborator.” Where that entry goes the usual (and rewarding) route of forcing Kira to deal with Bajoran history and present-day politics, here, Kira mostly watches in horror at the terrifying new reality she and the good doctor discover. Their method for arriving in The Other Place is the usual sort of hand-waving mumbo-jumbo; in “Mirror, Mirror,” Kirk and the others got caught in a transporter accident, here it’s a glitch in the wormhole caused by a plasma leak. The means don’t really matter. All that matters is one minute everything is fine, and the next, Bashir is being dragged away to work for the Other Odo, while the Other Kira takes our Kira to her office for some light exposition.

One of the reasons this episode is so much fun is the fact that the Other Kira recognizes where our Kira came from almost immediately. She explains that Kirk’s visit to this universe is an important part of their history, and in his efforts to help make life better for Terrans (humans and Vulcans), he actually made everything much, much worse. The Other Spock was successful in his goal to bring about peace and prosperity for his people, but in doing so, left them open to attack from an alliance between the Klingons and the Cardassians. The Bajorans, recognizing a good thing when they saw it, joined up with the aggressors, and now the Other Kira is running Deep Space Nine, oppressing poor humans like the Other O’Brien, and generally being all villainous and sexy and so forth.

It’s a depressing reveal, at least at first glance: one of the most satisfying elements of “Mirror, Mirror” is the way it recognized that even a seemingly “evil” place might be improved if the right ideas were spread around by the right people, and “Crossover” undermines Kirk’s actions almost immediately. It’s not just that his efforts were useless—he actively made things worse for the humans, just by trying to help. That’s a grim twist, although it plays fair with the rules, and certainly fits latter-day *Trek*, with all its obsession with the Prime Directive and attention to the unpredictable fallout of one’s actions. Besides, part of the entertainment value of an episode like this is seeing just how bad a different reality can possibly get. The writers aren’t going for subtlety. And if we wanted to get really deep, we could also see how this version of life plays to Kira’s fears about her role on the station as an enabler and appeaser. Her need to assert her legitimacy as a defender of her people is twisted back in her face, as the Other Kira and the Other Bajor sold their souls for a good deal.

Admittedly, this never has huge thematic relevance, as this episode isn’t designed to teach Kira an important lesson about who she might have been. The point is mostly to say, man, wouldn’t it be weird Odo was a bad guy, or if Sisko was a rogue, and then run with that. And it works. The second

season keeps sneaking up in unexpected ways, from effective character development, to the tossed-off mentions of the “Dominion”; what strikes me most about “Crossover” is its confidence. *Deep Space Nine* isn’t knocking every ball out of the park, but it has been hitting solid doubles and triples for some time now, and this episode banks on that consistency to pull an over-sized concept into its carefully constructed, semi-realistic world. “A dark parallel reality” shouldn’t have a place on a series worried about politics and consequences and enslavement, and yet it does; everything else is solid enough by now, we’re willing to take high concept in stride.

That’s one of the reasons I love the *Trek* franchise. [Last week](#), we dealt with exile and addiction, next up we have betrayal and traitors, and right here, we’ve got a lady who seems to be very much hitting on herself. And just as “Mirror, Mirror” gave the original series’ cast an opportunity to let loose (more than usual), “Crossover” is about providing actors with an escape from the normal restrictions of their roles. Avery Brooks is all self-loathing and cunning, Armin Shimerman is all quiet and tragically noble, Andrew Robinson goes full-on villain in the role of the station’s second in command. Nana Visitor has a chance to do her best femme fatale imitation, and is unsurprisingly tremendous. Colm Meaney is, well, the same; O’Brien is O’Brien no matter what universe you visit.

This episode makes use of the show’s backstory, both with the original *Trek* and the history of the Cardassian/Bajoran conflict, to help shore up the reality of its premise, but it’s also, for all the death and despair, something of a lark. Our Kira takes in everything with the solemnity of someone who knows the horrors of unfettered force all too well, and her relationship with the Other Kira is complex and strangely sad. While the episode never manages the delirious camp of “Mirror, Mirror” (a shift in the mines is no replacement for the agony booth), it gets a lot of mileage out of Kira’s soulful expression, and her wiliness in arranging for her and Bashir’s escape. There’s even a chance that she and the doctor have the same potentially positive effect on the locals as Kirk did in his time, although who knows how badly that will get corrupted once our heroes are gone. Regardless, the very nature of the premise prevents us from getting too worked up. The Other Quark is executed; Bashir shoots the Other Odo, which causes him to explode; and the Other Sisko finds his spine after some prompting from Kira, and he and the Other O’Brien flee the station, presumably to go have adventures. It’s all thrilling and neat, and in the end, Bashir and Kira make it back home safe and sound. “Crossover” is a fine example of what a show can do when it’s willing to loosen up a bit, paying homage to *TOS* while still managing to strike its own unique tone.

Stray observations:

- Curiously, the Other Garak isn’t all that interesting; he’s a plotter and a sneak, but in a standard-issue subordinate kind of way. I guess the character works best when we really don’t know exactly whose side he’s on.
- Between her bath here and her lounging outfit in “The Collaborator,” this appears to be the week Nana Visitor reminds us that she’s comfortable with her body. (And none of this comes across as exploitative, either; Kira is such a strong character that she’s very clearly aware and in charge of her sexuality.)

- Every time I hear “Terek Nor,” I think “Tech Noir,” the goofy cyberpunk club where Sarah Connor met the Terminator for the first time. But maybe that's just me.
- Whole lot of Dutch tilts on display.
- The one part of this that struck me as a bit convenient is the fact that while Kirk's exploits in the Mirror Universe are known on both sides of the divide, no one's ever tried to repeat his experience before. Other Kira (or Mirror Kira, if you like) even tells our Kira that transporters were specifically designed to prevent any more crossovers after Kirk's visit, which is impressive.

“The Collaborator” (season 2, episode 24; originally aired 5/22/1994)

In which Kira has a hard time standing by her man

Vedek Bareil isn't the most dynamic recurring character on *DS9*. He's not even in the top ten. Philip Anglim plays his role with a slow stoicism which is presumably meant to indicate inner peace, but reads like heavily sedated wood. As such, episodes like this one which require him to serve as an emotional focal point don't connect as strongly as they might. It's not just the stolidity. Bareil is calm and impassive, and doesn't say a whole lot. Even if we overlook the fact that the actor doesn't really have the presence to carry off this much quiet, that still means the character isn't prone to sharing his inner needs. Much of the mystery of “The Collaborator” hinges on Kira's efforts to discover Bareil's secrets. She's terrified a man she believes in, and has come to love, might have betrayed everything she stands for. But it's hard to get worked up about the Vedek's fate, even when he's getting unsettling visions from the Prophets about suicide and snakes and knife wounds. Bareil is just too unflappable to care about, and his decision to follow the visions and withdraw himself from contention for the role of Kai is, while explicable, not particularly interesting.

Thankfully, Bareil isn't the protagonist of the hour; Kira is, and her problems come through as clear as always. The vote for Kai is coming up, and all signs point to Bareil beating Winn for the position. Winn being the lovely, kind, and thoughtful Bajoran that she is, she decides to pop up to the station and try and smooth things over with Sisko, presumably to give herself a little more leverage with the other Vedeks. While she's on board, a Bajoran recognizes another Bajoran named Kubus Oak crossing the promenade. Kubus was part of the Bajoran government during the Cardassian occupation, and as part of the treaty between Bajor and Cardassia, all such collaborators are permanently exiled from their home. He tries to argue with Kira, but she, unsurprisingly, won't hear it. Things get really interesting, though, when Vedek Winn decides to grant Kubus sanctuary aboard her ship and free passage to Bajor. Kira is suspicious, and for good reason; Winn isn't simply being kind. Kubus swears that during the occupation, he heard Vedek Bareil speaking with Prylar Bek, a station official who revealed the location of Bajoran freedom fighters (including Kai Opaka's son) to the Cardassians. Kubus believes Bareil ordered that Bek give up the information, thus ensuring the deaths of 200 rebels.

The basic idea is that Winn thinks she has proof that Bareil worked the Cardassians, and Kira is determined to disprove her evidence, despite the fact that Bareil doesn't seem all that worked up

about the accusation. Winn's behavior is to be expected. She's as self-centered and scheming as ever, sucking up to Sisko in a way that implies the two have long been the closest of friends, and calling Kira "child" in way you know really means "fuck off." She still believes the position of Kai is her Prophet-given right, and she'll do anything in her power to make it happen. Kubus's testimony isn't airtight, but it's enough to create doubt, and with the odds against her, doubt is all Winn can really ask for.

What makes this interesting is what Kira does. Of course she tries to find evidence clearing Bareil's name; even if she had no connection with the Vedek, her dislike of Winn would drive her to investigate. The problem is, as soon as she hears what Kubus has to say, the doubts start popping up. Not because Kubus is a reliable witness, or that she'd suspected Bareil before, but because she expects betrayal. It's something that happens in relationships, especially in the early stages—as soon as we become vulnerable to someone, as soon as we care enough that they can hurt us, we start waiting for the other shoe to drop, presumably on our heads. After a lifetime of fighting an entrenched enemy, living in a world where getting close to someone meant another weak point the Cardassians could exploit, it makes sense that Kira would have trust issues. The episode doesn't even make a big deal out of it. First she has her doubts, and then, as she does her own digging and finds records tampered with and suggestive evidence, those doubts get deeper, until they become practical certainties. The paradox is, the more she trusted Bareil, the more she was willing to commit to him, the easier it becomes to believe the worst. "I love him," she tells Odo, but only after she's already started to think he's guilty. On another show, this might look like careless characterization—Kira has to be suspicious, or else the episode doesn't really have a middle. But here, it fits with what we know of her.

While this is going on, Bareil keeps having his visions, and as narrative directions go, it's an unusual choice. Most of the impact of "The Collaborator" comes from Kira, because she's the only one we see have an arc, but it didn't have to be that way. Over the course of the episode, Bareil is first nudged, and then prodded, and finally driven to giving up a position he's spent presumably most of his life pursuing. In his first scenes with Kira, he seems hopeful about the coming election, modest but comfortable in his potential for success. But by the end, he drops out of the race, a decision which comes partly from his own conscience, and partly in response to the Prophets' guidance. While we see that guidance for ourselves—a series of dream-like sequences full of symbol logic and foreboding—we don't see Bareil shift from the man he is at the beginning of the episode to the man he is at the end. While the visions themselves are compelling, they don't take the place of actual character development, which means the images gradually lose their impact. I'm growing to appreciate the show's occasional attempts at mysticism, and I especially like the idea of Bareil getting powerful, if confusing, lessons from above. I just wish we got to see him putting those lessons together.

So Vedek Winn becomes Kai Winn, which is utterly terrifying. At first, Kira thinks Bareil stepped aside to hide his complicity in the massacre of freedom fighters, an assumption Bareil is all too happy to confirm. But she doesn't do some more digging, and learns that Bareil is lying; he was away the week before the massacre, and couldn't have given Prylar Bek (who killed himself, by the way) the order to reveal the location of the fighters to the Cardassians. When Kira confronts him with this, Bareil

explains the truth. It was Kai Opaka herself who'd ordered the information released, because the Cardassians had threatened to kill a thousand innocent Bajorans if they didn't get what they wanted. She gave up her son to protect others, but of course this could never come out, because it would destroy Bajor—their most beloved religious leader, a collaborator? Bareil stood aside and allowed Winn's ascension because it was the only way he could protect Opaka's legacy. He and Kira resume their relationship, and everything is fine, except a greedy villain has the most powerful religious position on the planet, and Kira now knows just how easy it is to lose everything. As if she had ever forgotten.

Stray observations:

- Odo gets flustered when Kira tells him she loves Bareil. Is this the first hint we've had that Odo's feelings for Kira may go beyond friendship? I think maybe.
- I loathe Winn. Just wanted to reiterate that.

Next week: O'Brien faces "The Tribunal," and the Dominion makes itself known in "The Jem'Hadar," as we close out the second season, and prepare for our summer hiatus.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Tribunal”/“The Jem’Hadar”[Zack Handlen](#)[6/28/12 10:00AM](#)**“Tribunal” (season 2, episode 25; originally aired 6/5/1994)***In which, on Cardassia, the truth handles you...*

I suppose I should save my thoughts on the second season as a whole for the latter half of this review, but I will say this now: The last few weeks have been one heck of a run. “Tribunal” continues the trend, giving us our first close look at the Cardassian legal system, as well as giving the writers a chance to torment poor O’Brien. The show is getting good at pushing its boundaries, and extrapolating its main ideas until they make sense as a cohesive system. Which is to say, with earlier *Star Trek* shows, most cultures and conflicts were one-offs. [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#) was more aggressive with its continuity, but gave off a constant sense of departure, of problems resolved and left behind. Sisko doesn’t have a spaceship. He has a space station, and that means that even when he beats the Cardassians at whatever game they’re playing—as he does this week—he’ll still have to keep winning again and again and again. I’ve heard that some fans dismiss *Deep Space Nine* as overly grim, but while the show deals in serious subjects without blinking, I’ve never found it depressing. It’s honest, that’s all. Before this series, the franchise was about the pure utopia of the journey, of constant motion, of seeking and never being entirely satisfied. With *DS9*, the franchise creates a home, and then sets to establishing the cost of defending it.

There are plenty of reasons to like “Tribunal,” and I’ll do my best to cover all of them, but the one that strikes me most in retrospect is how neatly the episode works to undermine the requirements of its supposed genre. I’m not talking about science-fiction tropes; O’Brien’s arrest, incarceration, and trial all fit neatly into the framework of a courtroom drama, right down to the seemingly friendly

prosecution (Makbar turns cold in a hurry, but we're introduced to her criticizing her colleagues for their poor treatment of their prisoner—she does it because she wants Miles to look good for the cameras, of course), the underdog defense attorney who's full of well-earned wisdom, and all the expected objections and over-rulings and sudden reversals this sort of story requires. And yet at every turn, these concepts are subverted and mocked. O'Brien and the other people from Deep Space Nine (particularly Odo, who is allowed to serve as the chief's advisor and de facto defense) continually treat the trial under standard judicial rules, but that's not how Cardassian jurisprudence works. As we're informed again and again, when a prisoner is brought before the court on Cardassia, he or she has already been found guilty. The sentence has been decided, and the execution scheduled. The "trial" is pure performance, intended as a way to educate citizens of the importance of obeying the state, and the glory of serving the whole.

This means there's no outlet for the tension that courtroom drama typically thrives on. At every turn, O'Brien and Odo are thwarted in their attempts to treat the situation in the usual way. No one will tell O'Brien what he's charged with, no matter how often he asks, and when his attorney, the venerable Kovat (Fritz Weaver, a character actor who, among other things, played a fascist head of state in [The Twilight Zone's "The Obsolete Man"](#)), pays him a visit, all the Cardassian offers is platitudes about how much better everything will be if O'Brien just gives in. O'Brien asks him how many cases he's won, but even before Kovat answers, the question is moot. The judicial elements of the episode play out like a subtle black comedy, as our heroes behave in ways we've come to expect from such stories, and the judges and officials throw them back at every turn. We've heard many times before of the horrors of Cardassian law, but this is the first time we've really gotten a chance to see it first hand. It's frustrating in all the right ways, to the point where it almost seems like a flaw in the episode that O'Brien is ultimately released. Sisko comes up with the right solution to the problem (i.e. the truth), but there's something so permanent and awful about Miles' situation that it's hard to shake the impression that he's doomed no matter what anyone does.

Still, as cruelly amusing as this all is, it would be difficult to watch a character we care about get put through the wringer if our heroes didn't put up such a good show. Much of what makes the Cardassian system run is its ruthless and persistent ability to stamp out resistance through bureaucratic force. Arrest someone, humiliate them, and assure them over and over that their guilt has been verified beyond all doubt, and you haven't just imprisoned them—you've gone a long way toward reducing them, convincing the individual that their self-definition is less important than the definition imposed on them by the state. O'Brien, having been raised in a society where being a person matters more than being a cog in a machine, does what he can to stand up for himself. He's frightened, but he doesn't back down until he's forced to, and you never get the sense from him that he's even considered the idea that the charges (whatever they are) might have merit. Odo turns out to be a major ally, in an unexpected but entirely sensible twist; he understands the Cardassian legal system better than anyone else on the station, and by getting involved in the case, he at least manages to give voice to the obvious problems with process. This hour could've been a depressing

slog right up until the end, but the way O’Brien, Odo, and Keiko (watching on from the gallery) show a determined, unified face make it more thrilling and frustrating than grim.

As for the actual story, it’s fine—another example of the Cardassians trying to force the Federation presence out of the demilitarized zone via complicated, outlandish stratagem. This time, they surgically alter a Cardassian spy to look like a former Starfleet soldier named Boone, who served with O’Brien on the *Rutledge*. While O’Brien is rushing to go on vacation, the fake Boone bumps into him on the promenade, they exchange a few words (Colm Meaney does an excellent, “Oh hey, I have to get going, but I really am delighted to see you!”; it’s a small touch that really fits the character), and Boone records them to use as a security code to get clearance into a weapons locker, where he steals two dozen photon warheads. The idea is to make it look like O’Brien was working with the Maquis, this serving as proof of high-level Federation collaboration with the group. It’s the sort of plan you expect Lex Luthor to scribble down in his notes while watching a James Bond film, and its loopiness is especially obvious when contrasted against the rest of the episode. It works fine for what it needs to do—first get the innocent O’Brien incarcerated, then find an easy way for Sisko to both prove his innocence and force the Cardassians to release him—but it demonstrates one of the ongoing clashes on the show: the way standard genre plotting, with its tendencies towards contrivance and reliance on outrageous shocks, can come up against more ambitious characterization and thematic depth.

Science fiction is the language *DS9* uses to tell its stories, and that language can occasionally fall short of the show’s ambitions. Yet, when the two dovetail together, it makes for remarkable television.

“Duet” and “The Wire” were so effective because of their twists and big ideas—“Duet” was the first time we heard of the remarkable talents of Cardassian plastic surgeons, after all. But those twists stemmed from character in a way the Boone subplot doesn’t. There’s a brief mention of O’Brien’s well-known hatred of Cardassians, but it’s not really relevant, and the fact that the whole thing is a frame job shifts the focus away from what’s really at stake here. The system doesn’t work because it fakes crimes; it works because it makes every person on Cardassia a tool to be used at the government’s whims. O’Brien gets off on what is essentially a technicality. His release may sow some seeds of doubt among the citizens, but it serves as an anticlimax for an otherwise terrific hour.

Thankfully, as anticlimaxes go, this one is easy to swallow; it’s not like I particularly wanted to see Miles doomed to a life of hard labor and occasional torture. Although he seems to view getting a do-over on his vacation with about as much enthusiasm.

Stray observations:

- One of *DS9*’s smaller, but very welcome, accomplishments so far: O’Brien and Keiko’s relationship. Keiko can come across as harsh at times, but their interaction makes sense, and it makes sense that Miles would be drawn to a tough woman. On *TNG*, their fights were played largely for laughs, but the more we see of them together on this show, the more I like them both.
- The episode goes out of its way to inform us, and then remind us, that Cardassian citizens have a molar removed for identification purposes when they’re children. (Poor Miles loses one of his

teeth soon after his arrest.) This pays off when we learn Bashir was able to identify Boone as a Cardassian impostor by his missing tooth. Except 1.) the info is cool enough it doesn't actually need to lead to anything to be worthwhile and 2.) surely there are better ways to determine someone's species than just checking if they have enough teeth.

“The Jem’Hadar” (season 2, episode 26; originally aired 6/12/1994)

In which the Dominion makes its presence known...

So, here were at that the real conclusion of season two, with an episode that starts paying off some impressively subtle hints scattered through the previous 25 entries. On its own “The Jem’Hadar” is pretty good—but as mentioned above, I’d like to at least pay a nod to the second season as a whole before getting into the particulars of the finale. To sum up, then: It’s good. Like, “exceeding expectations” good, and in a way that completely caught me off-guard. In my time reviewing various *Trek* shows, I’ve grown used to expecting a specific kind of excellence; namely, the episodic kind. In reviewing a season of [the original series](#), or *TNG*, I judged its success largely based on how many good-to-great hours that season held. That’s not to say I didn’t love both shows for their ensembles and respective worlds, but their main value to me was as a sort of anthology with recurring characters. While *TNG* flirted with serialization, its focus was still primarily on individual stories, and while I got a good sense of Picard’s *Enterprise*, and how the principals functioned aboard it, the episodes themselves remained by and large standalone entities.

That’s not how *Deep Space Nine* works. Those earlier shows followed the more traditional television model; *DS9* was part of a gradual move to more long-term narrative persistence that came to define the modern television landscape, for good *and* bad. Here, luckily, it’s entirely to the good. There are a few standout episodes in season two (“The Wire,” “Tribunal,” [“Crossover”](#)—add your own in the comments), but what one really comes away with from watching it all is a sense of an ongoing story that’s just starting to get up to speed. Individual hours don’t matter as much as the way scenes of Sisko and others interacting and dealing with life on the station come together; the season is more than the sum of its parts. Which may be one of the reasons that *DS9* never seemed as appealing to me as a kid as the original show or *TNG*. To get the full effect, you really do have to watch nearly everything, because even the weakest hours inform and build on that sense of continuity. Which isn’t to say you couldn’t just wander into some random episode and have fun with it, but one of the great gifts of this medium is investment over time, and *DS9* is making good use of it. I look forward to watching each week in part because I just want to spend time with these people in this place, and that’s a tremendous advantage for any series. The flaws are still visible, but as long as the show maintains a consistency in character and detail, they’re not as damaging as they might be. In summary, I’m a fan, and while I’m excited for my next project, I’m also already looking forward to returning to this particular space station soon.

With that said, let's focus on "The Jem'Hadar," which serves to begin the Dominion's entrance into *DS9* in earnest. I'm skeptical of cliffhangers, but this one works well because it sets up story problems which aren't intended to be resolved immediately in the next season's premiere. The finale introduces an opposing force which is presumably meant to be with us for a long time, and here's where all that stuff I was talking about above pays off: Unlike *TNG*'s haphazard attempts to lay groundwork for the Borg's reappearance, the allusions we've heard to the Dominion have been both organic and persistent enough to have noticeable effect. When Sisko learns that the race of reptilian soldiers who have taken him and Quark captive are the elite fighting force of the Dominion, this revelation has actual weight to it. I can't say how effective it would have been if I'd been watching this when it originally aired (I already knew the Dominion was important going into the series), and the episode doesn't rely on the foreshadowing for most of its dramatic impact. But it still feels like something that's been planned and built to over time, and that wouldn't have been possible without *DS9*'s efforts at continuity.

I wish I could've gone into this one without any knowledge about the plot, though, because for the first 15 minutes or so, "The Jem'Hadar" looks like it's telling a completely different story than the one we end up with. Sisko sees Jake working on a science project, decides the project isn't ambitious enough, and proposes a planetary survey that could also serve (in Sisko's mind) as a father-and-son working vacation. Jake's excited, and invites Nog along; Quark, who desperately wants permission to use the station's video monitors to sell merchandise, tags along as well in a misguided attempt to earn Sisko's friendship. All of which means that, for a surprisingly long time, the episode keeps it light. We get a lot of humor out of Avery Brooks's slow burn, and the way Quark's efforts at ingratiating himself are at odds with his basic loathing and mistrust of the outdoors. But Sisko and Jake get a little time together, and Nog manages to impress the older man. Then a telekinetic alien shows up, knocks Sisko down, and gets him, Quark, and herself captured by the Jem'Hadar.

It's an abrupt shift, although it's not as though the tone suddenly goes full *Schindler's List*. The alien, who calls herself Eris, tells Sisko that the Dominion conquered her home world, and her monologue on the subject is the first real attempt to distinguish the Dominion as baddies: apparently, they first invite new civilizations to join their ranks, and if that doesn't work, it's on to brutal domination. Time will tell just what drives them to conquer, but it's already intriguing how much this sounds like the dark side version of the Federation's handshake-and-hugs approach. In the ideal future of *Star Trek*, everybody can eventually be friends provided we're all patient and understanding, and friendship means unification. It's a lovely thought, but an optimistic one, and I like the idea that the Dominion could show how such a program could be twisted into, well, assimilation. (Come to think, the Borg are also a spin what the Federation does. Hopefully I already thought of that during my *TNG* reviews.) While we ultimately learn that Eris is a Dominion spy, pretending to be captive just to get a sense of Starfleet's power and intentions, there's no reason to believe that the story she tells isn't true, and it's doubtful that the Federation, or anyone else, will be able to find a peaceful means for resolving the conflict that doesn't mean absolute surrender.

We also learn in this episode that the Dominion has been getting pissed off about the Federation's intrusions into its territory via the wormhole, and that they've been planning their response for a while, which gives them an edge. Sisko only gets a chance to speak with one of the Jem'Hadar, an arrogant thug who expresses disappointment that Sisko and Quark aren't Klingons; the makeup here is impressive, but we've had warriors on the series before, and time will tell just how bad these dudes actually are. What's more intriguing is the way the hour drives home just how little our heroes know and understand about their potential enemy. We don't even know what the Dominion *is*, exactly. The Jem'Hadar makes reference to the "Founders," and while Eris claims those are just a myth, Sisko theorizes in the end that she herself was one of them—but what exactly does that mean? This helps increase the sense that the DS9 crew is about to face off against a threat that may have them significantly outmatched, a sense which is multiplied a hundredfold during the final space battle. After Sisko, Quark, and Eris (who's still pretending to be a victim) are rescued, the group, along with the *Odyssey*, a Federation ship which became involved once the Jem'Hadar notified everyone whom they'd captured, head for home. But even though the good guys are retreating, one Jem'Hadar ship does a suicide run directly into the *Odyssey* (a much bigger ship, by the way), destroying themselves and it instantly. To sum up: Our heroes are about to face off against an enemy with powers they can't understand, a social structure they know nothing about, and resources they can only imagine. And that enemy is willing to sacrifice itself to kill, simply to make sure they've left the right impression.

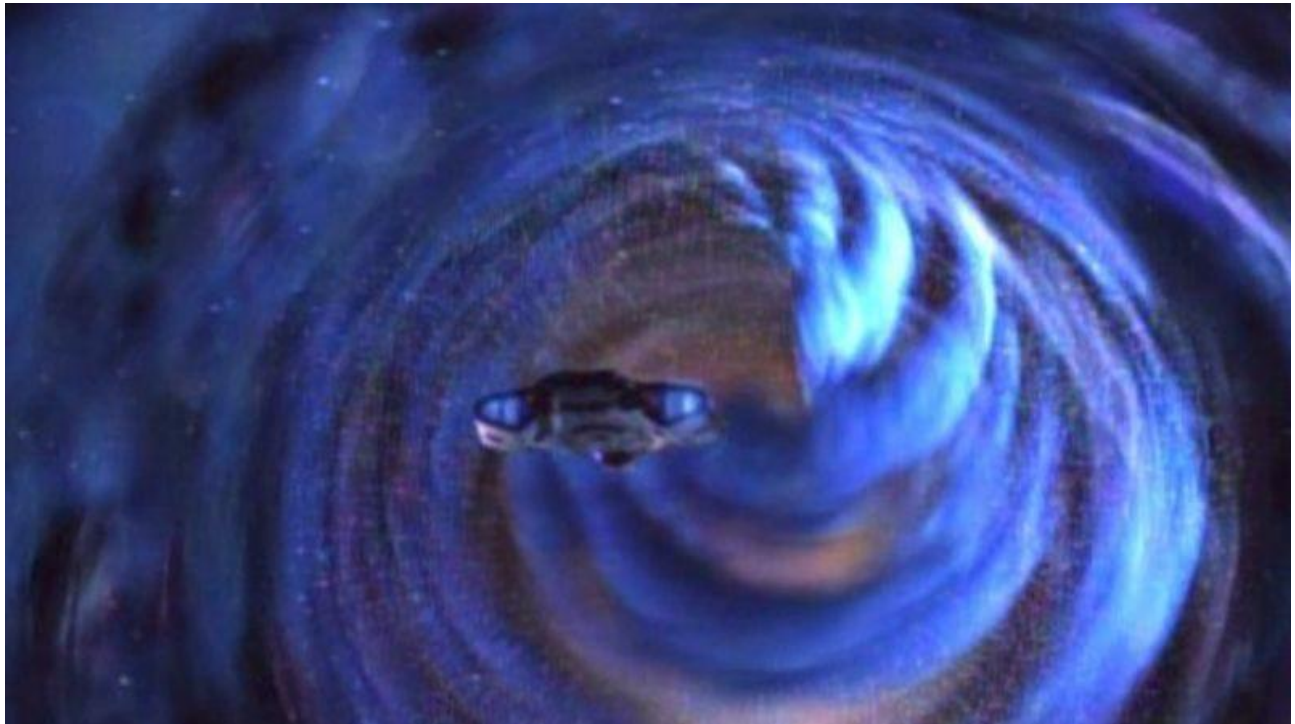
Well, it worked. I don't know what happens next, but things look bad for Sisko, Kira, Odo, Dax, Bashir, O'Brien, Quark, and the rest. But that's very, very good for us.

Stray observations:

- Quark's arguments with Sisko follow the "he's a dick right up until he says something that really makes you think" model, which always annoys me a little. But Quark sells it well enough; his point that the Ferengi were never as bad as humans in their capitalist phase isn't a bad one, and, while it doesn't make up for him being such an irritant for most of the episode, it's hard to completely dismiss his arguments. Plus, without his greediness, Sisko would never have realized Eris was a fake, so that's a point for the large-lobed gentleman.
- Jake and Nog's efforts to operate the runabout by themselves were cute, but came across a little like padding. Also, I'm surprised Sisko didn't have some kind of fail-safe built into the autopilot that would could return the ship back to the station without him in the case of disaster. I get that he wouldn't want Jake joyriding with the thing, but would it be that hard to give him a safe way to return home if Sisko wasn't around?
- I'm going to assume Eris got some info off the station's computers before she beamed away (and how frightening is it that O'Brien can't track where the transporter signal comes from?), because otherwise, it seems like she gives Sisko a lot more information about the Dominion than she gets from him about the Federation. But maybe that was the point all along.

Next week: Happy day after the Fourth of July! We'll return to *Deep Space Nine* in the fall, but I hope you'll join me when, starting July 12th, I laugh myself to death with *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

SEASON THREE

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Search”[Zack Handlen](#)[9/06/12 10:00AM](#)**“The Search, Part One” (season 3, episode 1; originally aired 9/26/1994)***In which Sisko and crew go looking for the Founders...*

Previously on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*—the Jem’Hadar! The Dominion! The Founders: do they exist? Nice psychic lady with wrap-around ears! Space battle! EXPLOSION! (That was a ship.) Escape, suspense, struggle, betrayal. Nice psychic lady with wrap-around ears is secretly EVIL. And poof, she’s gone. Sisko wants to make a stand, but can even he stop what’s coming?

It was a good note on which to end a season, ambitious, shocking, and purposeful, serving as a pay-off to a number of previously dropped hints, and suggesting a clear direction for the show’s next year. Sisko’s final, grim speech is the best kind of cliffhanger for serialized television, or at least the easiest sort to follow up, because it presents a sense of danger without creating specific narrative expectations. Turning Captain Picard into a member of the Borg may sound like a good idea—and sure, it resulted in one of [Star Trek: The Next Generation’s best episodes](#), and one of the most memorable season finales in the history of television—but it’s a hard act to follow, especially when you give your audience a full summer to parse out the various ways the story can resolve. *DS9*’s second season ended with the implication that the shit was about to hit the fan, but there’s no direct idea of where it’s going to come from. There are powerful folks out in the Gamma Quadrant. They have plans. And that’s all we know.

Which leaves the two-part third season première with a bit of wiggle-room. The show could’ve chosen to put the Dominion threat on the back-burner for a few episodes, and give the audience a chance to

get re-acquainted with Sisko, Kira, and the rest. Instead, “The Search, Part One” jumps headlong into the fray, with our heroes deciding to get proactive in the face of seemingly impossible odds. This is exciting for a couple of reasons. For one, it’s a new narrative tack for a *Trek* show, given that previous crews have been more reactive than proactive when it came to danger. Given the lack of proper serialization on [the original series](#), it’s not surprising that Kirk and friends only get involved when there’s some kind of clear and present danger, but even Picard’s *Enterprise* only finds a crisis when they stumble over it in their explorations or are ordered there by Starfleet. Sisko isn’t having any of that, and while he is working under Starfleet’s instructions, he’s also pushing to go back into the Gamma Quadrant and confront the Dominion directly, so they can try and forge some kind of alliance before everything goes to hell. It changes the feel of the show. Instead of waiting around dreading bad news, the folks on DS9 are getting their shit together and trying to save themselves before it’s too late.

That’s the other reason this is so exciting, though: it may already be too late. I wasn’t kidding about the “seemingly impossible odds.” The first part’s cold open is basically Kira and the others clarifying just how screwed they’ll be if the Dominion decides to attack, given that the station is the first line of defense outside the wormhole. The answer? Pretty damn screwed. This isn’t surprising, but the thoroughness of the scene effectively sets up stakes that will last us for a long time. *TNG* managed to make the Borg terrifying by creating a threat which could circumvent the *Enterprise*’s impressive technology. The Jem’Hadar are undeniably impressive, having taken out an *Enterprise*-class ship last season, but just as importantly, Deep Space Nine is in no way equipped to handle any serious threat. The station has O’Brien, and it has its defenses, but it can’t escape via warp drive if conditions become untenable, and it’s not built to withstand a prolonged attack. The Dominion isn’t just a bad guy the crew can bump into, yell at, and then flee. The Borg are effective because they manage to get under *Star Trek*’s usually unshakeable sense that everything will be fine if we all just sit down and talk about it, because the Borg aren’t interested in a dialogue. But here, we’ve got villains who are perfectly willing to talk; they’ll just go ahead and do as they like regardless of whatever anyone else says.

Sisko is already playing the angles, of course. When “The Search” begins, he’s curiously absent from Kira’s crew briefing, making a surprise appearance at the end in a brand new ship, the *Defiant*. It’s a warship, of a kind the Federation isn’t generally known for; as Sisko explains later, when Starfleet realized the threat posed by the Borg was going to need a stronger response. Thankfully the Borg War ended shortly after it began, but the *Defiant*, a prototype of the fast-moving, well-armed vessel that might make the difference in a significant battle, was still floating around. It has its problems—a slight tendency to shake itself to pieces when pushed to full throttle, for one—but it’s something, at least, and it comes with a Romulan-loaned cloaking device (along with a Romulan operator named T’Pol). Sisko intends to use the ship to make his first move: finding the Founders, and convincing them that the Federation doesn’t represent a threat. It’s not the boldest play, but options are scarce, and going by simulations and basic common sense, a treaty looks like the only way the good guys are going to walk away from this with their heads attached.

Of course, the trip is a horrible failure, but we don’t really see the fall out until the next episode, apart from the smoke, fire, and screaming which make up the climax of “The Search”’s first hour. This

opening half is more about reiterating the stakes, and getting the team together for one big adventure, of the sort we hardly ever see on *DS9*. It's exciting too, as Sisko lays out his plan, starts making preparations, and even browbeats Quark into coming along for the ride. Admittedly, Quark doesn't absolutely need to go on the trip. From a writing perspective, he's there mostly to pad an hour that doesn't have enough plot on its own, given that it needs to end on a sudden, doom-laden, attack. But he's enjoyable enough—and the idea of the whole crew going along for an adventure is so fun—that I feel like a poor sport for being nitpicky.

Odo, meanwhile, plays a more important role in this two-parter than his nominal nemesis, although his story doesn't get going until the second half. In this episode, he gets pissy when he finds out his authority is once again being challenged by Starfleet personnel, a plotline that keeps coming up on the series but never really seems to pay off. It's not like Odo is really going to quit at this point, and while the idea that Starfleet is constantly trying to interfere with him fits in with the series' on-going tension between the station and the external bureaucracies, it's gotten to the point where it's just white noise. This time, though, it serves as a reminder of just how distant and separate Odo often feels from those around him, so that's to the good, although that only really becomes clear in retrospect. (Come to think, the already good scene between Odo and Quark in the *Defiant's* crew quarters, which ends with Odo snapping at Quark before turning into his liquid form, serves the same purpose. So maybe I was a little too quick on the "padding" comment.)

Odo is reluctant to go on the mission, but Kira talks him into it, and soon he's staring at a nebula on a star chart, convinced that it's calling to him and is driven to return to it as soon as he can. Which turns out to be a lot sooner than anyone expected, as Sisko's trip goes from "fine" to "godawful" in under five minutes. These two episodes have some revelations, and some twists, but deep down, their most impressive accomplishment is in underlining the message of that cold open, and of the episode which ended last season: the Dominion and the Founders are bad, bad news. "The Search, Part One" ends with the *Defiant* under attack, after Dax and O'Brien beam down to a relay station and inadvertently set off an alarm. Sisko is forced to abandon his people on the planet below, but it doesn't do him much good, as the Jem'Hadar break his cloak and beam aboard his ship almost immediately.

Oh, and the first big twist/revelation moment happens here: Kira, after the attack on the *Defiant*, wakes up on a shuttlecraft with Odo. He seems strange, and when she asks him what happened, there are certain blanks in the conversation—the shapeshifter doesn't know where the others are, or what happened to the ship. As the symbol of law and order on the show, it's unsettling to see Odo overcome by his impulses; he flies to the Omarion Nebula like a being possessed. Which, in a way, he is. He and Kira land on a Class M planet, where they find a lake made of a substance that looks a lot like Odo looks in his liquid form, and for good reason. It's a sea of other shapeshifters, and one of them, a woman who appears to share Odo's difficulties with wears and faces, tells him what he's been wanting to hear since the show began: "Welcome home."

Which has to be good news, right?

Stray observations:

- Welcome back, everybody! I hope some of you followed me over to the [Monty Python's Flying Circus](#) reviews, and if you didn't, well, I hope you didn't get any unfortunate tattoos this summer.
- Sisko manipulating Quark into coming along on the *Defiant* makes for an interesting scene, and one which seems to have more significance than Quark's ultimate (and relatively minimal) contribution to the mission. It's a way to remind the audience that Sisko isn't like other *Trek* heroes: he isn't afraid to play dirty. (Oh sure, Kirk would say he'd play dirty, but Sisko seems to actually like it.)
- The fight aboard the *Defiant* against the Jem'Hadar is great; there's no real expectation that any of the heroes will die (although I guess the Romulan exchange student could've), but it still plays as messy and nigh on catastrophic.

"The Search, Part Two" (season 3, episode 2; originally aired 10/3/1994)

In which Odo and Sisko find what they were looking for, and what they were looking for finds them...

So, Odo is home. And everything is very nice and peaceful, right up until Kira pokes her nose into a mysterious door, and we find out that the shapeshifters are actually the Founders of the Dominion.

As twists go, it's a doozy, although I have to admit I find it more intellectually interesting than emotionally so. Odo's search for his origins was always static; he looks mournful, he pokes around some relic, and then we move on. At least when we learned about his time in a science lab, there was some tension as he struggled to resolve his relationship with one of the scientists who studied him. When it came to the parts of his backstory which weren't obviously connected to the rest of the show, it was all pretty conceptual. Odo the orphan being struggling to establish his place and purpose in the universe is powerful, and often richly moving. Odo muddling through clues and instinctual longings, somewhat less so, and while the turn here at least means that his progenitors are going to be important as more than just a character conflict, it's hard to get a visceral sense of the betrayal the changeling must feel. Right now, it's cool because it's unexpected, and because of what it might lead to down the line. In and of itself, it lacks the drama of, say, Garak's various origin stories from ["The Wire."](#)

It doesn't help that the shapeshifters are, up until that final reveal, really, really boring. There's no question that it would be difficult to imagine how a civilization full of shapeshifters might be different from our own, but the second half of "The Search" doesn't even try. These aliens spend most of their time hanging out in the big pool Odo and Kira found them in at the end of the last episode—either that or they take on the shapes of other creatures and inorganic materials in order to better commune with nature. This is all fairly generic "enlightened species" stuff, and while it works to make the episode's twist all the more of a surprise—they're so peaceful and kind, and they have such a history of being wronged!—it doesn't help to personalize Odo's struggle. As cool as the twist is, and as much

as I look forward to seeing it play out in the weeks ahead, it steals Odo's story away from him, turning his personal and private search into something bigger—and, I'd argue, less moving.

Also distracting, while still being pretty darn cool: Sisko, O'Brien, Bashir, Dax, and T'Rul's trip to the land of Make Believe. After Sisko and Bashir are rescued by a seemingly unharmed Dax and O'Brien, they return to DS9 to learn that the Dominion has agreed to sign a treaty with the Federation. Which is all well and good, only something strange is going on, because the Federation is playing awfully nice as the Jem'Hadar run roughshod over the station; Starfleet is also apparently trying to keep the Romulan Empire out of the negotiations, which would almost certainly lead to interstellar war. Sisko tries to stop it, and we run through a gamut of familiar faces from Admiral Nechayev to Garak (it's a short gamut) as the situation goes from promising to catastrophic. Eventually, Sisko gets himself arrested for fighting one of the Jem'Hadar, and the others break him out of his cell, determined to blow up the wormhole and end negotiations with the Dominion for good, or at least the next 70 years or so.

It's all a fake, although it takes roughly the entire episode before the reveal that the whole scenario is part of a Dominion attempt to see just how far Sisko and his crew will go to fight back. (The answer is, unsurprisingly, as far as it takes.) I love a good mind-fuck storyline, and since the Sisko plot seemed suspicious from the moment Dax and O'Brien busted into Sisko and Bashir's escape pod, it's a relief to have those suspicions confirmed in the end. Partly because hey, I like being right, and partly because if this had been real, it would've been some terrible storytelling. It's nerve-wracking to watch an episode of a show you love, feeling certain that it hasn't gone off the rails, but not being absolutely sure, and that's what's kept me watching through most of "The Search, Part Two"'s running time. *Trek* has played the kind of game before, and it would've been ludicrous of the show to cram this much story into a 20-minute space, but I wasn't sure until the final scene, and it made for a fun ride.

Again, though, it takes away from Odo's story, and it makes his ultimate decision to leave the Founders behind less a strong statement of character, and more the inevitability of the show's dynamics. Of course Odo wasn't going to turn evil all of a sudden, and of course such an important character to the series wasn't going to disappear in the second episode of the third season, but that's not what I should have been thinking when Odo made his decision. It's possible to play conflict like this, even when the outcome is preordained, in a way that has an impact. That's not what happens here, though, and it's hard not to be disappointed. Discovering that what you've been searching for all your life isn't what you wanted after all is a familiar, but potentially rich, theme, but while a fair amount of the episode is given over to Odo trying to fit in with the others, and only intermittently succeeding, it's hard to get too worked up about his struggles while you're trying to parse what exactly is happening back on DS9.

Still, I think the episode works on the whole, especially when taken in context with the first part of the première. While Odo's discovery isn't as intense as I'd like it to be, it's still a strong step forward for the character, and one which may have some important ramifications in weeks to come. More importantly, the conclusion of the story initiated in previous hour doesn't offer much in the way of

hope for our heroes. This isn't one of those tales of hopeless odds faced and defeated. It's more a story of a bunch of people who realize they're screwed, really hope they aren't screwed, take a tentative step towards unscrewing themselves, and fail completely. This is a two-parter which resolves a cliffhanger by having the good guys lose. You can qualify that: Nobody died, which usually counts as a small victory, and at the end of the episode, everything goes back to roughly the same way it was before. Only Odo is, at the very least, disillusioned, and despite all their plans, our heroes accomplished roughly nothing.

At first, I was disappointed by the easy out the conclusion seems to represent; Borath (another wrap-around ears alien) and the shapeshifting Founders release their captives as easily as if they were just waiting for someone to use the magic word. But while it's a bit of a story cheat (because I'm still sure Sisko and company are going to make the Dominion wish they'd killed them), it also serves to establish the depth of the threat the DS9 crew faces. The Founders get the information they want—Sisko is willing to blow up the wormhole if he believes the Dominion is enough of a threat—but they aren't concerned. He's not a danger, just an irritant. He's so insignificant that they'll release him as a gesture of goodwill to Odo. In the two-part opener of *Deep Space Nine's* third season, the good guys try the only plan they can think of to stave off destruction, and they fail. It's a grim way to start a war, but a brilliant way to start a season.

Stray observations:

- Okay, there is one unqualified victory: Odo deciding to stay with his friends is important, although it's hard to get too excited about it, in the face of everything else.
- The most emotionally resonant aspect of Odo's storyline is his relationship with Kira. She's the only person Odo really trusts, and it's fitting that she's the one with him when he finally finds his way home.
- The irony of a race which prides itself on its ability to empathize with other creatures creating something like the Dominion has a lot of potential.
- "We will miss you, Odo. But you will miss us ever more." Yeah, that's not passive-aggressive or anything.

Next week: Things get back to normal as we visit "The House Of Quark" and hope Dax rediscovers her "Equilibrium."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The House Of Quark”/“Equilibrium”[Zack Handlen](#)[9/13/12 10:00AM](#)**“The House Of Quark” (season 3, episode 3; originally aired 10/10/1994)***In which Quark faces down the Klingon version of a shotgun wedding...*

Here’s something I never thought I’d be writing: This Quark-centric episode is funny, well-paced, and has easily the best depiction of marriage I’ve ever seen on a *Star Trek* series. That the last point has actually nothing to do with everyone’s favorite Ferengi is beside the point. The episode’s main plotline—Quark gets kidnapped and brought to the Klingon homeworld by a Klingon woman desperate to maintain control of her house—sounds like it should’ve been a disaster, given that it allows for any number of opportunities for the show to play up the traditional Ferengi cowardice and greed. But while those elements are nominally present, the hour does Quark and itself the service of treating everything with a straight face. The jokes are there, no question, but the conflict is played seriously; the humor comes from the contrast between Quark’s common sense approach to life, and the Klingon’s pompous, violent determination to fixate on the honor in everything. This serves the rather neat trick of having us laugh with Quark far more often than we laugh at him (an important distinction for a show regular), even going so far as to leave him triumphant in the face of seemingly impossible odds. All this, plus a subplot with Keiko and O’Brien that, again, is hands down the most honest and least histrionic view of a long-term romantic relationship that the franchise has managed, makes for good times.

All of this may have something to do with Ron Moore joining the *DS9* behind-the-scenes crew, both as a supervising producer and frequent contributing writer. He wrote the teleplay for “House Of Quark,” based on a story from Tom Benko. And in addition to Moore’s usual fondness for the intricacies and

challenges of Klingon culture, the plotting is smart and well-crafted, an essential and often overlooked element in this kind of comedy.

It all starts out simply enough: With the threat of the Dominion scaring away his clientele, Quark's bar has fallen on hard times. When a drunken Klingon falls on his own knife one evening, the quick-thinking Ferengi decides this is just the opportunity he needs to liven up the place, and he tells an elaborate lie to Odo to make it seem like he killed the dead Klingon in actual combat. Business gets better for a while, as everyone wants to hear about Quark's turn as a powerful warrior (presumably most of these folks are either new to the station or looking for chuckles), but this exaggerated version of events quickly creates new problems, as the dead Klingon, Kozak, was the head of a powerful Klingon house. Soon enough, Kozak's brother, D'Ghor, shows up to threaten Quark, but not in the way you'd expect. D'Ghor claims he doesn't want revenge—he's just there to make sure that his brother died in combat with honor, and not in some ridiculous accident.

This is clever, as it goes against expectations, but in a way that makes sense. The Klingon lust for honor has been one of the species' most consistent characteristics (well, at least since they were reintroduced in [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#)), and while it's obvious Quark will face some consequence for his lies, the idea that Kozak's brother would actually want him to stick to his story is unexpected and intriguing. And it gets more complicated from there, because a scene or two later, Kozak's widow, Grilka, shows up. Turns out that D'Ghor isn't exactly trustworthy, and the reason he wants Quark to stick to the lie about Kozak is so that he can gain control of Kozak's house. If Kozak died by accident, Grilka can apply for (and most likely receive) special dispensation, allowing her to take over. But if he died in combat, there's no wiggle room, and D'Ghor can step in. So Grilka knocks Quark out, takes him back home, and marries him before he realizes what's going on. Comedy!

And entertaining comedy at that. One of the reasons "House Of Quark" works is that it never gets bogged down in over-explaining itself or trying to force farce when it's not really necessary. Just the idea of Quark as the head of a Klingon household is amusing enough, especially under Gowron's bulging glare; there's no need to force the humor, and no need to make Quark look even more foolish than he already is. In fact, the Ferengi comes off as very much the hero this time around. When Grilka explains her predicament, Quark approaches it from a practical perspective, asking for a chance to look into the finances of both Kozak and D'Ghor's houses over the past few years. He proves that D'Ghor has been manipulating the books into order to put himself in a position to attack his brother, and while this evidence of fiduciary misconduct doesn't exactly impress the Klingon high command, it does show that Quark is resourceful, and puts us firmly on his side. For a long time, the joke about the Ferengi was that they were corrupt, cowardly, and stupid. *DS9* has done its best to turn this around by making corruption and cowardice into a philosophy, one which most of us would be hard put to deny has a part in our own lives. They aren't cartoonish stereotypes; they're just practical.

Rom is becoming more and more of an inadvertent conscience to Quark. I love how their relationship plays out in this episode, with Rom so completely convinced that he's in the wrong, but not being able to help himself from speaking up anyway. (And he's nearly always right, of course.) Through his

ingenuity, his wit, and, yes, his courage, Quark manages to impress any number of humanoids including Gowron, most of the Klingon council, and, as seems to be a running joke with the Ferengi episodes, Grilka herself. (The joke being Quark is somehow a ladies man.) But, in a coda I didn't see coming and was honestly, no kidding, moved by, the most important person Quark ends up impressing is his brother. The episode starts with Quark pretending he's a great warrior to drum up business, and it ends with him using the fact that he isn't a great warrior to win the day. Even though he's still suffering from a drop in profits, Rom wants to hear the real story one more time. It's very sweet, but it earns its sweetness.

As much as I like Quark's adventures, though, I think I'm most impressed at the episode's B-story, which deals with a quiet but serious crisis in the O'Brien marriage. We've talked before about how *DS9* has done a good job to rehabilitate this relationship; what had been mostly played for laughs on *TNG* (Poor O'Brien, his wife is a nagging shrew!) has been turned into a more believable partnership—and a less cringe-worthy at that. Keiko, a prickly character who can be initially off-putting, has gone from caricature to fully developed person, and her struggles aboard the station, first to open a school for human and Bajoran (and other) children, and then to keep on teaching science at the school in spite of the objections of religious fanatics, have been among the highlights of the first two years of the show.

It isn't just Quark's bar that is suffering low occupancy due to Dominion fears; most of the Bajoran families who were living on the station have relocated to Bajor, which means that Keiko's school is down to Jake and Nog. So she decides she has no choice but to shut the place down, an inevitable decision that leaves her understandably depressed. (In a nice touch, she mentions that she's still tutoring Jake and Nog, although given what happens at the end of the episode, God only knows where their education will end up.) O'Brien tries to cheer her up with some romantic dinners and general O'Brien-being-awesome-ness, but while Keiko appreciates the efforts, and clearly enjoys the intimacy, it doesn't clear away the fundamental problem.

What I love about this storyline, and what so impressed me that I actually found myself more looking forward to it than to the Quark plot, is it treats Keiko's despondency as a serious and important concern. She isn't being irrational or selfish or crazy or "a woman," which was pretty much the go to explanation for any female behavior, sane or otherwise, for too long in the *Trek*-verse. She's simply unfulfilled, and really, as interesting as the school was, it was always going to be a temporary measure. Through O'Brien's conversations with Sisko and Bashir (who, surprisingly, offer the best advice), the episode gets into the way couples make sacrifices over the course of a long-term relationship, and how those sacrifices, even when made with the best of intentions, don't always work forever. While Bashir's comment on how much smiling time various gifts and promises will earn the troubled suitor isn't the most sensitive way to put things, I like how it at least tacitly acknowledges that Keiko's sadness is something deep and important, and not just her suffering from a case of "I refuse to cheer up!" flu. And while it's weird that the two people O'Brien turns to for advice are Sisko and Bashir, which gives the whole thing a kind of "Gotta figure out these wimmen!" vibe, the conversations are thoughtful and respectful on the whole.

Maybe what I really feel here is relief to see a storyline that could've so easily been a mistake, full of unrecognized sexism and cheap conclusions, handled in a way that feels adult. O'Brien realizes that Keiko needs a chance to go off on her own and be an actual, no-kidding-around botanist. Now, okay, Keiko could've figured this out on her own, and the fact that O'Brien arranges her trip to Bajor on a science expedition means she's a largely passive entity throughout the hour. Still, her dilemma is driven by the fact that she believes she owes it to O'Brien to see things through, and it makes sense that she'd need encouragement from her husband—encouragement that isn't so much "I'll save you" as it is "I love you, and I realize what you did for me, so let me give you something back." I like that, and I like the light it shines on O'Brien, Keiko, and their marriage. Episodes like "House Of Quark" serve a variety of purposes—when done well, they're fun, a bit of breather between serious stuff, and, in a stealthy way, deepen our emotional investment in the ensemble. This one was done well, and has me even more excited about the upcoming season.

Stray observations:

- The implication of the cold open is that Morn is going to get lucky with one of the Dabo girls. Let's never speak of this again.
- Great use of minor serialization, with the Dominion references in both plots. The war hasn't started yet, but the effects are ongoing.
- I'm glad Keiko mentions Molly near the end of the episode. I was wondering if she'd been lost in a transporter accident.

"Equilibrium" (season 3, episode 4; originally aired 10/17/1994)

In which Dax loses her balance...

Well, the buzz had to end sooner or later. While "Equilibrium" is far from bad—it gives us our first glimpse of the Trill homeworld and some interesting insights into the symbiont selection process—it lacks the drive and revelations of ["The Search"](#) or the tight scripting of "The House Of Quark." This is an hour that gets by on mystery, and the resolution to that mystery, while conceptually a big deal, it doesn't really justify all the buildup, because it's essentially static. Everything important in the episode happened before it began, and the actual character drama is relegated to our heroes staring at computer screens or shouting at administrators we've never met before. Dax has some hallucinations, and they are deeply creepy, so that's something at least. Again, this isn't bad, and if it had popped up in the previous seasons, I would be a lot more effusive in my praise for the things that "Equilibrium" gets right. But it seems as though *DS9* has turned a corner, and that means higher expectations.

One big part of the problem is that once again, this is a Dax-centric episode that goes out of its way to put Dax on the sidelines. Jadzia gets more screen time than she has in past outings, thankfully, only really disappearing for a big portion of the climax, but it is frustrating to see a character whose humor and competency have become her defining traits reduced to a frightened victim. During a dinner party at the Siskos', Jadzia picks up a keyboard and starts playing a song she swears she remembers. She

quickly becomes obsessed, humming the tune constantly without even realizing it, and her temper worsens to the point where she picks fights with Sisko and Kira over imagined insults. As if that wasn't bad enough, Dax has a vision that she's being followed by a masked stranger who looks like he (or she) just stepped out of a Dario Argento film. On Bashir and Sisko's advice, Dax decides to return to the Trill homeworld to see if anything can be done.

So far, so good, although Dax's mood-problems separate her from a story that should be told primarily through her eyes—that's the way character-centric episodes tend to work, after all. (It's certainly how Quark's worked.) The mystery is intriguing, the masked stranger effectively unsettling, and the possibility of seeing Dax's home is at least conceptually intriguing, even if it's not what I'd call a huge draw. Thankfully, while the "civilized" part of Trill-land is generic, the reveal that the symbionts live in underground pools, where they float in milky fluid and communicate via electrical signals, has an appropriately Cronenbergian feel. Dax struggles through a few more hallucinations, then collapses, and it's up to Bashir and Sisko to save the day.

Which is problematic. Much as I love Bashir and Sisko (and I definitely do), character-centric episodes don't come every week, and Sisko tends to be the center of attention for a large portion of the rest of the show. I certainly wouldn't object to Bashir having adventures (which he's had), but shouldn't "Equilibrium" belong to Dax? Jadzia has come a long way since the first season, but there's still a distance to her character, in a way that sets her apart from the rest of the group. Yes, her alien-ness makes her distinct, but Odo is, if anything, even stranger than she is, and the show has never had any problems helping us relate to the shapeshifter. The premise of the hour is that the Dax symbiont was once joined with a host named Joran Belar, a composer who turned out to be unstable (and a murderer to boot), so the symbiont was forcibly taken from him. Unfortunately, the fact that Joran was joined with Dax at all indicates a serious flaw in the host selection process. The standard assumption is that only a small portion of Trills are capable of joining with symbionts, and that a joining with a host who was mentally unsuitable would result in quick rejection—hence, the selection committee has to weed through thousands of applicants, accepting only handful, for everyone's well-being. However, because Joran survived the process, despite being psychotic, his short candidacy exposes the assumption for the lie it is.

This is complicated, and also something that's clearly supposed to be a big deal. Given what we've seen of the rigors of the selection process, it makes sense that the Trill society would be rocked to the core by such a discovery, but it doesn't have much impact in the episode itself. Really, the cover-up exists to justify why Dax is having such a lousy time, and the reveal about what's actually going on exists so that Sisko and Bashir can have leverage over the Trill counselor who wants to see Jadzia dead. Which means that all these expository discoveries deflate the tension, rather than pay it off.

It's especially problematic that the one person whom is most affected by all of this is unconscious when the truth is presented—Dax's decision to merge with the Joran-memories rather than die is too obvious and inevitable to carry much weight, and it even happens offscreen. There's a lovely scene of Dax getting into a milk pool and hugging Joran (either a dream or another hallucination), and then she

and Sisko chat, to give us the sense that Dax is on the road to recovery, even though it won't be the easiest journey. And that's it. There's a hollow place in the center of all of this, because the show keeps refusing to let Dax work through her own problems. People keep having to rescue her, and she tends to be unconscious when this happens.

Still, there are effective scenes throughout "Equilibrium." The dinner party is delightful, especially Odo's forced attempts at whisking, and it's great to see how far Bashir has come in terms of his relationship with Dax. He cares about her a great deal, but the creepy, predatory aspect of his affections has subsided, to the point where Dax is able to visit Bashir in his quarters on the *Defiant* (on their trip to Trillville) and he doesn't hit on her once. In fact, he invites her to spend the night without any sexual overtones at all (well, there's some vague awkwardness, but it's never vocalized). It's great seeing Bashir and Sisko working together, and I would love an episode that gives us more adventures of both characters. It's just a shame that, once again, Dax is stuck as the damsel in distress.

Stray observations:

- The question is, Dax now knows the truth about why these memories were hidden from her, and the con that's been put over the majority of her race—so how does she take the news? The episode just elides over the issue; first she's unconscious, then she's warmly accepting Joran as a part of her past, then she's dealing with her anger issues. I can accept that she wouldn't want to expose the lie, but it would've been nice to actually see her reacting to it and making her own decisions.
- Again, we see how far Sisko will go to protect his people.

Next week: Kira goes full Cardassian in "Second Skin," and Odo deals with "The Abandoned."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Second Skin”/“The Abandoned”[Zack Handlen](#)[9/20/12 10:00AM](#)**“Second Skin” (season 3, episode 5; originally aired 10/24/1994)***In which Kira doesn’t recognize herself anymore...*

Try to imagine what it would be like to live a reality where plastic surgery wasn’t just convincing—it was perfect. Where you could go to a doctor, and in a few days (that’s how long Kira’s transition takes in “Second Skin,” so far as we know) come out with a new face, or a new body, or, hell, a new race. Forget, for the moment, the implausibility of it all—how can you generate actual living tissue? How are there no scars, no aches, how is the transition so goddamn perfect—and just focus on the implications. To no longer be restricted by the body you were born into could change everything, especially when you remember that the Federation doesn’t use money, so the process wouldn’t be cost prohibitive. It makes you wonder how many characters we’ve seen on the show have had work done. And it also raises some interesting questions about the nature of identity. I wonder if, in the universe of *Star Trek*, authenticity is even more important, and even harder to determine, than it is today. We’ve already had at least one person remake himself to look enough like someone else to fool nearly everyone (back in [“Duet”](#)—sure, all the DS9 crew had to go on for comparison was a photo, but it was still impressive). Between Odo’s shape-shifting and the apparent wonders of facial reconstruction, I’m amazed anyone trusts anyone as anyone.

“Second Skin” takes good advantage of this idea from both sides: on the one, you’ve got Kira, transported to Cardassia and made over to look like a Cardassian spy, through a transformation so thorough and carefully constructed that she gradually starts to doubt her own identity; and on the other, you’ve got Legate Tekenya Ghemor (Lawrence Pressman), the father of Kira’s supposed spy

identity, who believes that his daughter has finally come home after years of undercover work. Sure, “Iliana” claims she doesn’t remember him or their house, and acts convinced that she really is Bajoran, but those are just implanted memories still lingering in her system. Tekeny is convinced that some tender loving care is all Kira needs to understand the truth, and that makes Kira’s struggle to remember who she really is even more difficult. Entek, the Obsidian Order agent in charge of Kira’s supposed re-integration, is pleasant enough, but he’s also forceful, and there’s a threat of violence behind every chummy smile, a threat which only grows more and more obvious as the episode wears on. But Tekeny is respectful, patient, and kind, and despite his position of political power, seems to have no real artifice about him. It would be difficult, in the face of such relentless decency, to keep saying no.

Kira just barely makes it through, although that has as much to do with the fact that her sanity isn’t the main target, as it does her resistance and determination. There’s no question that her sudden transformation is a ruse, and to its credit, the episode never really tries to pretend otherwise; Entek (the great character actor Gregory Sierra) keeps up the game for a while, even going so far as to show Kira the frozen body of the supposed real Kira, but while he pays lip service to the importance of “Iliana” realizing her true identity, the scenario never takes on the heated intensity of some of the other mind-fucks we’ve seen on *Trek* series. Episodes like [Star Trek: The Next Generation’s “Future Imperfect”](#) or even this season’s premiere (which is one of the rare cases of character’s being trapped in an alternate reality which they never question—more proof of the Dominion’s power) work harder to convince the people trapped in their webs and the audience, whereas “Second Skin” continually cuts away to Sisko’s determined attempts to rescue his officer. The mystery in a story like this is always “Why is this happening,” but instead of trying to disorient us, Entek’s plot plays in a largely straightforward fashion. Fun as it is when a show tries to make us question our basic assumptions, the fact that this episode doesn’t is largely a relief, especially after the events of [“The Search, Part 2.”](#)

The thing is, *DS9* isn’t rewriting the *Trek* playbook (at least, not yet); the show has made changes to basic assumptions (in suggesting that negotiations can be impossible; there’s a danger inherent in exploration; good people don’t always see eye to eye), but we’re still using the same kind of plots the franchise has always used. Both episodes we’re looking at this week rely on a lot of magic-resembling technology to get their work done, and both work off of central concepts *TNG* covered before. The difference is in presentation, and in the way the series uses its characters’ histories to make familiar ideas richer and more complex.

When Entek starts pushing Kira for answers, Tekeny decides enough is enough. He’s worried how far Entek (and, by extension, the Obsidian Order) will go for the truth, and he doesn’t want to see a woman he believes he loves injured, so he makes plans to get Kira taken off-world. The twist is that Tekeny’s sincerity and kindness are the real deal. He really does have a daughter named Iliana, he really does think Kira is that daughter, and he really doesn’t want her tortured. Tekeny is one of the dissidents working to undermine the Cardassians’ totalitarian regime, and Entek put together this entire con in order to get dirt on the legate to use to attack the entire dissident movement. It’s a clever plot, if a little ornate, and while it ends up making the last quarter of the episode top-heavy

(Kira learns Tekeny's secret, then realizes how they're both being played, then Entek shows up and gets the drop on them, then they're rescued at the last minute by Garak and the others, then Kira and Tekeny have to share a moment together), it's a fun way to catch viewers off-guard by playing with our expectations. It's only natural to think Kira is the target of Entek's efforts, and to find out she isn't—she's merely convenient—helps make the plot seem fresh. It also leads to a surprisingly touching final conversation between Tekeny and Kira on DS9; the scene pushes the sentiment hard, and it's not entirely earned by the episode, but the actors make it work well enough.

It helps that Tekeny makes sure to warn Kira about Garak before he goes, which ends the hour on a subtle, but resonant, note of paranoia. As much as "Second Skin" focuses on Kira and her travails, the episode also works as a stealth Garak spotlight, taking the ex-spy (or is he?) out of his comfort zone when Sisko forces him to join them on a rescue mission. Garak started off as a charming figure of mystery, but as his character development continues, the writers have taken him in a direction I didn't see coming. Garak isn't some kind of secret hero. He's complicated, in ways that resist easy answers, and his behavior in this episode demonstrates just how unwilling he is to be cast into the role of a "good guy." The tailor with a history is still likeable, but it's a likeability that doesn't always translate to other characters on the show. (Sisko has no compunctions in blackmailing Garak into doing what he wants, for one.) We don't know why Garak does what he does, but Andrew Robinson has managed to make that ambiguity utterly consistent, to the point where I don't always know what to expect from the character, but I believe him capable of nearly anything. Yet he's far from an outright villain, either, and the way this episode uses the tension between Garak's sense of self-preservation, and his desire to do, if not the right thing, than at least the thing which will make him look like he's doing the right thing, is excellent. There's a desperation and terror behind his charm that we last saw evident in ["The Wire,"](#) and I'm happy to see it hasn't been forgotten.

Stray observations:

- It doesn't take too much away from the episode, but Kira's resemblance to the real Iliana (who may or may not be dead) is a strange coincidence. Then again, it serves as another demonstration of the scope and power of the Obsidian Order. It doesn't matter that Kira is a prominent official. They decided they wanted her for reasons that had basically nothing to do with who she was (although her status as a Bajoran "terrorist," and her role on DS9, probably didn't hurt the cover story), and they grabbed her. It also serves as an example of how arrogant power can overreach itself, as their plan would've worked if they'd grabbed someone who didn't have such dedicated friends. (And given that they could make Kira look like a Cardassian so effortlessly, they could've picked anyone to play this game with.)
- "Commander, this is extortion." "Mmm. Yes, it is." -Garak and Sisko, having the best exchange of the episode

“The Abandoned” (season 3, episode 6; originally aired 10/31/1994)*In which Odo tries to make up for the sins of the father/mother...*

Here’s another familiar story: One of our heroes “adopts” an orphaned alien genetically pre-disposed to violent, anti-social behavior. On *TNG*, [“Suddenly Human”](#) had Picard working with a human raised by aliens, trying to get him to adapt to human ways. In “The Abandoned,” Odo tries to teach a young member of the Jem’Hadar not to want to kill everything. Both characters ultimately fail, although the ending of “Suddenly Human” is, unsurprisingly, more optimistic. But Odo’s story is more effective overall, because the never-named boy he works with doesn’t come from some random, previously unheard of alien culture. The Jem’Hadar are an established, important race in *DS9*’s burgeoning mythology, and, even more importantly, Odo, as a changeling, has a very specific relationship to that race, a relationship with alters his motivations. Picard did what he did because he’s a good man, and because good men try and do the right thing. Odo does what he does because he wants to prove beings don’t have to live the lives dictated by their genetics. It’s a partly selfish motive that’s still driven largely by altruistic intent, and the result is honest, sad, and the best use of Odo’s backstory that the show has managed this season.

That last bit is important, because the fact that Odo is an orphan Founder—that he basically had the same sort of upbringing as the Jem’Hadar boy, albeit in a lab, and over a much longer period of time—is a big deal. Odo was introduced as unique, someone without the society or context to understand his abilities or his place in the galaxy. But then, when he finally tracked down his homeworld, he learned that the rest of his race are cruel fascists, subjugating others to their will in order to protect themselves from any possible threat. It’s a shocking, painful transformation for the constable, and what helps make “The Abandoned” so satisfying is that it finds a way to make that change impact on an emotional *and* intellectual level. The reveal in “The Search” was a twist that took place in the last few minutes of the episode, without allowing much room for fallout. Now, though, Odo is trying to define himself in new ways, and this episode shows the difficulties inherent in such a journey.

It also gives us a better sense of who the Jem’Hadar are, and just how thoroughly the Founders have enslaved them. When Quark buys some salvage from one of his usual associates, he discovers a lot of scrap metal, and a stasis chamber with a living infant boy inside. Bashir runs tests on the child, but is unable to determine his species; all the good doctor can be sure of is that the kid is growing at a fantastic rate, which is almost certainly the result of some high-class genetic engineering. So the infant becomes a toddler, and then toddler becomes a young man, and by now it’s obvious to everyone that the orphan is one of the Jem’Hadar. (He looks like he has a face made out of dinosaurs, for one.) The older he gets, the more violent and angry he becomes, and that’s where Odo comes in. In addition to their high metabolism (which seems to plateau when they hit prime fighting age) and built-in drug addiction, the Jem’Hadar are essentially programmed from birth to respect and instinctually obey the Founders. While Odo may not be officially on the team, he is a shape-changer, and that means the orphan will listen to what he says.

What follows is a fascinating, and occasionally heartbreaking, case of nature versus nurture, with the former winning a decisive victory over the latter. (Admittedly, the genetic engineering makes for suspect results.) When I mentioned this episode on Twitter, a few people compared it to the *TNG* episode [“I, Borg,”](#) in that both episodes have a hostile enemy set into a friendly environment. It makes for an interesting contrast. On the *Enterprise*, Dr. Crusher and Geordi were able to form a connection with Hugh, the stranded Borg, humanizing a heretofore faceless, and terrifying, threat. On *DS9*, Odo tries to teach the boy about patience, reserve, and self-control, only for the Jem’Hadar to totally reject his efforts. The enemy has been faced, the talks were opened, and the result of our best efforts is a phaser in the face and a snarl. Not a bad way to remind the audience once again of just how unprepared our heroes are against their newest enemy.

Still, to my mind, the most compelling part of Odo’s story is how desperate he is throughout the hour to put a bright face on things. To this point, Odo has been defined by his gruff cynicism. He’s the classic “seen it all, didn’t believe most of it” lawman, an observer whose isolation puts him in a position to hold himself apart from everyone. Only now, he’s found his place, and it’s awful, and he’s struggling to come to terms with that. There’s a great scene early in the hour when Kira brings by a plant as a house-warming gift, and Odo, after initially not wanting to let her inside his new apartment, tells her excitedly about all his plans to try new shapes and new textures. It’s a sweet exchange between the two of them, but it also shows just how vulnerable and lonely Odo really is. He isn’t a cynic at heart; he wants to engage with life, he’s just terrified of risking a sense of self which had to have been tenuous even before he found out he came from a long line of villainous dictators. And now he’s got this young Jem’Hadar, a boy in a similar position to his own, and that means he has a chance to prove that he really can define himself by his own terms. If the Jem’Hadar can be saved, if this nearly psychotic warrior can learn to live on his own, Odo’s own position becomes more secure, and less solitary. But of course he can’t, because the universe doesn’t organize itself to strengthen our sense of self. The damage to the Jem’Hadar as a people is too deep to be healed by good intentions alone, and in the end, the best Odo can do is take the kid back to where he belongs.

The relationship resembles a father-son dynamic to an extent, so it’s not surprising that the subplot in “The Abandoned” spends some time with Jake and Sisko in their non-work lives. Jake has a girlfriend, a 20 year-old Dabo girl (who he’s mentioned before, right? Sometimes the details blur together), and Sisko is determined to put a stop to it. Only, when he has the girl, Mardah (Jill Sayre) over for a family dinner, he finds himself learning more about his son than he was expecting, and the new information changes his mind about the relationship. It’s not a bad storyline, and as always, I enjoy seeing Sisko work his way through being a father. I love that there’s never any question about him being a great dad—we don’t have to deal with a lot of clichés about Sisko working too hard, or about the two of them being estranged for drama’s sake. Jake is a little awkward around his father, but in a natural, non-dickish, teenage kind of way.

The contrast between Jake and his girlfriend, however, makes their romance harder to understand. Jake doesn’t look older than 16, and Mardah (who is likeable, and seems sweet) looks older than 20, and the two actors don’t have a huge amount of chemistry between them. The implication could be

that the relationship is more platonic than sexual, but it's treated so lightly that it's hard to tell. 20 to 16 isn't the worst ever, but imagine if Jake was a girl, and Mardah a guy—it'd be weird, and it *is* weird, in a way that the episode isn't really willing to deal with.

Still, the main message—parents don't always know what's best for their children—fits in well with Odo's arc, and certainly has a happier ending than the changeling's. Again I find myself appreciating the episode as much for texture as for plot. Detail-wise, as with "Second Skin," there's a lot of entertaining sci-fi nonsense going on, what with its genetically engineered lizard soldier whose surgically induced drug addiction requires him to take constant doses of a synthetic compound only his shape-changing masters can create. But the fact that the episode takes this nonsense seriously, and, even better, uses it as a means to explore how people struggle to connect, and how that struggle is often more a reflection of their own needs. What Odo wants to do for the Jem'Hadar foundling is both commendable and selfish, and it's possible to admire him for the former, while still recognizing the cost of the latter.

Stray observations:

- O'Brien's "16 years old and dating a Dabo girl. Godspeed, Jake," is funny, but it also creeps me out. Yes, it's standard to think of a teenage guy dating an older woman as some sort of sexual fantasy brought to life, but there's still a power imbalance. Plus, while Mardah does seem to legitimately care for Jake, we don't know enough about her to understand why she'd be interested in someone so young. I don't want to make more of this than it deserves (and I suspect I already have), but in a show which is normally so good about staying true to its characters, this is a disappointing, if brief, misstep.
- "Now, tell me more about my poet hustler son." —Sisko
- The speed with which the Jem'Hadar boy goes from "troubled, but trying" to "warrior able to use the station's transporter and steal a phaser" is frightening, and great. It breaks down any illusion that Odo could control him for long. (It also demonstrates the absurdity of the Federation wanting to hold the boy in a lab. That would end badly.)

Next week: We face down some "Civil Defense," and Dax gets intimate while cruising the "Meridian."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Civil Defense”/“Meridian”[Zack Handlen](#)[9/27/12 10:00AM](#)**“Civil Defense”(season 3, episode 7; originally aired 11/7/1994)***In which the ghost in the machine fights back...*

The IMDb lists only two credits for Mike Krohn: the teleplay for the 1995 TV movie *Ed McBain’s 87th Precinct: Lightning*, and the script for this episode. I’m not sure why he quit; I don’t know if it was personal reasons, or because his career didn’t pan out the way he wanted. Maybe *Lightning* was a godawful mess. But “Civil Defense” is a fun, exciting hour of television, and Krohn’s writing is a big part of why it works. It’s well-constructed and beautifully paced, finding ways to escalate the tension and worsen the situation that all stem from the initial premise without ever becoming tiresome. The episode makes good use of the whole cast, and it’s funny as hell; the idea that the Cardassians would not only leave their security system intact when they left DS9, but that said system would have a seemingly infinite number of potentially lethal counter-measures (complete with Gul Dukat video!) for every possible threat is brilliant, and fits in well with everything we know about the station’s former landlords.

The key here is in the escalation. The plot is structured like a comedy sketch: Our heroes are faced with a not-hugely-serious problem, but when they try and solve that problem, they not only fail, they end up making the original problem into a concern, which then becomes a crisis, which then becomes a catastrophe. Here, the setup has O’Brien and Jake working in one of the station’s old ore processing rooms. Sisko comes to visit to see what’s taking so long, just as Jake, who’s been going through the Cardassian computer system and deleting as much of it as he can, comes across a set of files he can’t access. When O’Brien tries to delete these files, it sets in motion the Cardassian security system. A

recording of Gul Dukat pops up on the monitors all around the station, addressing Sisko, O'Brien, and Jake as Bajoran rebels, and ordering them to surrender to the authorities immediately. The doors to the room are sealed shut, and when Sisko tries to fool the program by pretending to surrender, the recorded Dukat responds by releasing toxic gas, forcing the three men to escape deeper into the processor. While this saves their lives, it has the unfortunate effect of throwing the station into full lockdown, the security system now being convinced that the "Bajoran rebels" are loose.

Things only get worse from there. In retrospect, this is a very simple, straightforward pattern. Again, like a comedy sketch, the episode introduces a premise—that the Cardassian security program is both extremely efficient and incredibly paranoid—and then takes up the rest of its time exploring that premise as thoroughly as possible. Which means that each section of the story follows the same arc—discovery, discussion, proposed solution, and oh crap, now we're even more screwed. But this isn't a bad structure by any means, and it's one that, when used well, draws excitement out of viewer expectation as much as it does the actual conflict. There's a reason I keep mentioning comedy: While the security program is consistently threatening, each subsequent reveal becomes more and more hilarious, creating a darkly comic momentum that carries the hour along as much the life-or-death danger. By the time Gul Dukat himself arrives, to gloat over the helplessness of his enemies only to soon find himself trapped as completely as they are, it's impossible not to laugh.

Dukat's entrance is particularly smart, too, because in the buildup to his appearance, the one constant in every discussion has always been that the station's former commander is the only one who could stop the security program. Dukat is in the videos (in his charming, "We're all friends here, please excuse the knife" way), and Dukat, presumably, would know the necessary codes to shut the system down. But Kira doesn't want to contact him, for the obvious reason that he's a creep, and would almost certainly use his power over her and DS9 to negotiate some kind of long-term advantage. This is, in fact, exactly what he does, telling Kira (in private) that he'll provide the codes only if she'll agree to allow a small, permanent Cardassian garrison aboard the station. But when Kira refuses the offer, and Dukat tries to leave to give everyone time to think things over, the program reveals it has an additional subroutine designed by one of Dukat's supervisors, on the assumption that the Gul might try and escape DS9 in the midst of a crisis. So: We spend the first half of the hour being told that Dukat could fix everything, Dukat shows up (which is a total surprise, by the way) operating on the same assumption, and then the institutional cynicism which put him in a position to lord it over Kira and the others ends up hoisting him by his own petard. It's tremendously satisfying, as well a great way to keep the viewer hooked—with the obvious answer out of the way, what's left?

In a story like this, character work is usually secondary to the twists and turns of the plot, but while "Civil Defense" never stops too long for serious discussion, Krohn still finds ways to give most of the cast their moments to shine. Sisko, Jake, and O'Brien make a fine team, and it's great to see Jake getting a chance to prove himself; in the climax of the episode, he first insists to be included on the possibly suicidal run to the reactor, and then disobeys his father in order to save O'Brien's life. In the command room, Garak makes an appearance, which is always welcome. The third season has already managed to integrate him more fully into the show than the first two seasons did, and for once, his

seemingly inexhaustible knowledge of Cardassian secrets prove inadequate to the task at hand. Garak first came across as a fascinating, mysterious figure of untouchable guile and brilliance, but now, while he hasn't lost his flair or his ability, he's more complex, and more capable of weakness. His open contempt for Dukat is both highly entertaining and unsettling; Dukat is an imminently hiss-worthy villain, but Garak's self-control keeps slipping bit by bit, which makes you wonder what's lurking underneath.

Kira also gets to be, well, Kira, much as Bashir is Bashir and Dax is, er, wounded. There's a funny moment when Dukat seems to be flirting with Kira, and Garak calls him on it, but apart from that, everyone behaves as you'd expect, with Kira holding everything together as best she can, and Bashir hanging out in the background until someone needs doctoring. The most pure character scenes in the episode come from Odo and Quark, trapped together in security. The two spar a bit, as Quark complains and rolls his eyes, but once again, the show finds the balance of two adversaries who've been at each other for so long they're basically best friends. Quark insists on staying with Odo because he knows that's the safest place on the station to be; Odo tells Quark he's the most "devious Ferengi" he's ever met; Quark complains that Odo's always reliable integrity is going to get them killed; and then Quark learns that Odo was lying about the "devious" stuff, which gives us a perfect conversation on which to the end the episode.

All told, this is a fine hour of television, an example of how to put together a thrilling, intelligent story which satisfies genre expectations while still working to confirm and expand our notions of the show's "world." It's a pity the writer never returned to DS9; if this script is any indication, he would've made a good fit.

Stray observations:

- It really, really sucked to be a Bajoran miner during the Cardassian occupation, huh?
- Out of curiosity, I checked [Memory Alpha](#) after writing the bulk of this review, and it turns out that while Krohn got the screenplay credit, his original draft was reworked by the entire writing staff; apparently, this was not a pleasant process. So maybe not such a good fit after all.
- Memory Alpha also mentions the Kira/Dukat moment, and mentions that Nana Visitor objected to Dukat's attraction being treated in a comedic vein. While I liked the joke, and I think the episode was moving too fast at that point to really stop work out the ramifications of such an attraction, her point is a good one: Kira would never, ever find Dukat's interest amusing.

"Meridian" (season 3, episode 8; originally aired 11/14/1994)

In which Dax falls in love...

Let's not mince words: This is a terrible episode, and the fact that nearly everyone involved recognized it as such in retrospect does little to dull the pain. It misuses and misunderstands Dax; it relies on a

contrived premise; and the romance which drives the plot is tepid, unconvincing, and often actively tedious. After establishing a high standard in the first quarter of the season, *DS9* dips back into the dregs of late period [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#), with a tale of thwarted passion which is supposed to be tragic, but isn't. I don't think it's the worst episode of the show I've seen, but it's up there, and it's a frustrating stumble for a series which had finally hit its groove.

Sisko, O'Brien, Bashir, and Dax are traveling through the Gamma Quadrant in the *Defiant*, when they come across an anomaly. They investigate, because that's what they do (it's been so long since I reviewed *TNG*, I forgot what it was like to have an episode spin off from the heroes' need to poke stuff), and find an entire planet with a severe Brigadoon complex. In case you're unfamiliar with the name, *Brigadoon* is a musical about a Scottish village which appears for only one day every hundred years. In this case, we've got a world which phases in and out of corporeality, because of crazy made-up science. As soon as the planet appears (and it's something of a coincidence that Sisko et al. just happened to be floating through space at the right time, huh?), Sisko makes contact with a group of villagers who've just come into being for the first time in about 60 years. The *DS9* team beams down, learns about the locals' situation, and Dax starts hooking up with a guy who likes her face dots. Ah, love.

It's nice to see *DS9* continuing in the fine *Star Trek* tradition of presuming women will be seduced by any man who stares at them long enough and then makes weird, invasive comments. I'll say this much for Deral (Brett Cullen, who will always be "that guy from [Lost](#)" to me); he's not hiding a dark secret, and he really is legitimately passionate about Jadzia. It's just, in the brief time we see the two together, that passion is never expressed in anything but the most generic terms. They flirt a bit, then he takes her for a walk in the woods, and then, presumably, they have sex. A few scenes later, Deral is talking about a house he wants to build for Dax when they finally get the planet-shifting problem solved; he's not proposing marriage, but it comes off as more than a little intense. A few scenes after that, Deral is offering to leave his people to come be with Dax, and then, when Deral decides he can't possibly abandon his culture, Dax offers to stay with him instead. When they end up parted by the episode's end, it's supposed to be so powerfully upsetting that Dax can't bear to talk about it, as though she's lost something vital to her life that can never be replaced.

In the right hands, this sort of tragedy can be immensely moving; the thought of finding someone who fits you so well you can't imagine life without them, only to be separated from them through some strange twist of circumstance, is difficult to sell, but potentially heartbreaking. "Meridian" never sells it. It never even comes close. Cullen isn't a terrible actor, but Deral and Dax never come off as anything more than a pair of eHarmony customers struggling through their first date. And the lack of chemistry makes the damage to Dax's identity even more bizarre. Deral can't possibly leave his people—why would Dax be so eager and ready to leave hers? She has a career in Starfleet, and a symbiote to develop and protect. I guess jumping ahead 60 years would certainly offer the slug in her stomach a few new life experiences, but this isn't even discussed or considered. She goes from being excited that Deral might come back to *DS9* with her, to being completely and unquestioningly willing to stay with him instead, with the only justification being her supposed devotion. Which, again, is

never satisfactorily demonstrated. Trying to create a believably deep love affair in the space of about 20 minutes can't be an easy task, but it's the only way this episode could've possibly worked. If Dax had found something in Delar she'd never found elsewhere, or if the script and the actors could have found a way to believably, intensely crazy for one another, that might have saved everything. I don't need to believe Dax was acting in her best interests. I just need to believe she thinks she is, and that never comes across. Instead, the Dax we know seems to disappear, to be replaced by some half-visible nobody eager to do what anyone tells her. In the end, she doesn't even make the choice that puts her back on the *Defiant*; her presence on the planet "destabilizes" the something or other, and she's forced to beam back to the ship, to mourn the loss of a man we'll all forget in a week.

Oh, and there's also a creepy subplot about an alien (played by Jeffrey Combs, one of my favorite actors, here making his Trek debut) who wants to fuck Kira, only Kira's not interested, so the alien asks Quark to make a holosuite program in which he (the alien) fucks Kira. The character behavior is more consistent than in the main storyline, and the cold open scene, in which Kira pretends that Odo is her lover to scare the alien off, is terrific. Hell, it even makes sense that Quark would be willing to help, as it's a shady deal which stops short of being outright evil. Combs manages to make the alien look like a disgusting pervert just by breathing a certain way, and Kira and Odo team up to make sure the jerk gets the comeuppance he richly deserves. But as always, I find myself thinking too much about the implications of the holosuites and holodecks, and how inevitably such machines would lead to psychotic breaks. Some of us have a hard enough time telling the difference between dreams and reality; can you imagine if your dreams were in 3-D? And talked back? Ugh.

Anyway, that's not really the point. I'm not a huge fan of Kira-as-object as a storyline, but she got her revenge, and Quark didn't get anything, so that worked out okay. Plus, every second on DS9 meant a second away from the Planet Of Boringness, which was a relief. I like the *Defiant*, and I like the way it opens up the show's possibilities, but if this is the result, maybe everyone should just stay home.

Next week: We spend more time on the "Defiant," and Lwaxana Troi returns in "Fascination."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Defiant”/“Fascination”Zack Handlen10/04/12 10:00AM**“Defiant” (season three, episode 9; originally aired 11/21/1994)***In which a familiar face returns...*

Last week (last Friday, in fact) marked the 25th anniversary of the premiere of **Star Trek: The Next Generation**. It's only appropriate, then, that both parts of this week's double feature involve crossover between *TNG* and *DS9*. That's a concept that nearly always sounds cooler than it is, although given that both shows exist in the same storytelling universe, there's at least some justification for Jonathan Frakes popping into Quark's for a drink. By now, Picard's *Enterprise* had been off the airwaves for over a year, so I imagine the sudden appearance of Riker in the cold open must've been an exciting moment for fans of both shows. But this sort of reunion always feels a little forced, a trifle pandering. Will Riker was a terrific presence on *TNG*, but he doesn't really belong on this space station—he should be off captaining his own ship by now, and having his own adventures. Which is why the reveal that he's not Will Riker is so cool. Will is a known quantity; he can have an edge, but he's a good guy

through and through, and he plays by the rules. Tom Riker, on the other hand, is unstable, desperate, and maybe a little nuts.

In case you don't remember, or your experience with *TNG* isn't as encyclopedic as mine (ha!), the episode fills you in: Tom, an exact genetic duplicate of everyone's favorite first officer, was created in a transporter accident which resulted in two Rikers, one of which continued on up the ranks in Starfleet, the other of which was stuck in an abandoned science station for eight years. **"Second Chances,"** Tom's debut (and sole appearance) on *TNG* is worth checking out, but for the context of "Defiant," all you need to know is that Tom wasn't happy to find out that someone else had his name and his life. He comes into this episode with a chip on his shoulder, determined to prove himself as the "better" Riker (or at least distinguish himself from his more successful counterpart), and the most recent manifestation of this drive is his involvement with the Maquis, which has driven him to the somewhat rash decision of stealing the *Defiant* and making a run on Cardassian territory.

That's not to say Tom isn't sincere. This is another Ron Moore script, and Moore excels at writing likeable characters pushed to make extreme, and often foolhardy, decisions. Tom's commitment to the Maquis is passionate enough to earn Kira's affections, even while she questions if his goals are worthwhile. On the *Enterprise*, Will Riker was *TNG*'s James T. Kirk, a two-fisted hero who thought good intentions and moral clarity were the best way to approach any problem. Picard's maturity helped temper Will's brashness, but Tom doesn't have any authority figure holding him back, and, since Will is already on the career path, he must spend all his time in Starfleet living in the shadow of the life he thought was his. He gave himself a new name, and now he's trying to find his own way—which brings us back to that whole ship-stealing thing. It's a great sequence, as Tom does a good job impersonating the other Riker, right up until he gets what he wants: the access codes to the ship. Then he stuns Kira, beams two other members of the Maquis aboard, and flees.

If "Defiant" has a downside, it's that, as a character, Tom never really comes into focus. Jonathan Frakes is certainly game, and there's dramatic potential in the concept, but most of his scenes are either standard "We're flying into enemy territory, this is very intense" *Star Trek* boilerplate or Kira trying to argue him into being responsible. To a degree, this makes sense; Tom is interesting, but Kira's the one we're invested in, and this is yet another opportunity to contrast her resistance-fighter past against her more law-abiding present. Listening to her explain the difference between a terrorist and

a hero is fascinating, and well-argued, so if the episode shortchanges its guest star in favor of her, I'm not going to complain that much. (Hence the "If.")

Still, this vagueness is problematic when it comes time for the episode's climax, as Kira works to convince Tom that his cause is lost, and his best bet is to turn himself in to Dukat and his men in order to save his crew. This should be at least moderately suspenseful, because up until this point, Tom has shown no inclination toward turning back or stepping down, not even when the odds are very clearly against him. He's determined, and what's more, everything we know about him indicates a man who's decided to give everything he has to his principles. It's not unbelievable that he'd stand down in the end, given that he's not an idiot and the lives of his crew were at stake, but the sequence ought to make us wonder just what he's going to do, and whether the Riker we know is gone forever. Instead, he listens, thinks a bit, and then goes along with surrendering. The implication is that Kira, with her fervor and top-notch debate skills, managed to wear him down over the course of their journey, but there's just not enough to Tom for this to register one way or the other. He's most compelling at the start, when we don't know his motivations or who he really is. The second half of the episode, he could be any random guest star, just another Starfleet officer so frustrated by the system they decided to take things into their own hands. It still works well enough, but it seems like a missed opportunity.

Even if the ending falls a few degrees shy of greatness, the rest of the hour is strong enough to make up for it; I can even see arguing that the compromised conclusion is part of the point, showing how fiery ideals often fizzle in the light of basic political reality. The latter is best exemplified by the episode's other plotline, which focuses on Sisko and his efforts to get the *Defiant* back before lives are lost, and Cardassian treaties are shattered. To do this, Sisko has to travel to Cardassia to work with Gul Dukat and his team; he also has to confess certain technical aspects of the *Defiant*, like its cloaking device, that he would've rather kept secret. Not that Korinas, the Obsidian Order member observing Sisko and Dukat's team-up, didn't already know about the cloak. Korinas knows an awful lot, actually, more than even Dukat—and that leads to some complications.

It's always impressive how much excitement the various *Trek* series are able to wring out of confrontations which are basically just people standing in various rooms threatening people in other rooms, and "Defiant" is no exception. Sisko's efforts to figure out where his ship is headed demonstrate once

again just how sharp he is, and the importance he puts on protecting his own; Tom's ill-advised foray would almost certainly lead to a Cardassian backlash against DS9 if he succeeded by even a fraction, and besides, that's Sisko's ship he stole, dammit, and you just don't do that. As always, the interplay between Dukat and Sisko makes for thrilling television, and the effort to place Dukat in a proper context, at odds with the Obsidian Order and missing a playdate with his son, effectively expand on an already rich antagonist. The son speech in particular is a fine piece of work, well-written and beautifully performed; Dukat complains in a way that makes him both more vulnerable, and more of a creep.

Combine all this with the suggestion that the Obsidian Order (which is gradually growing in importance in the show's mythology) is planning some big military move, and you have an episode that reinforces and strengthens the series' universe, while finding plenty of time for character drama and a cool crossover from a different show. The conclusion isn't quite as slam bang as the hour which leads up to it, but there's an appropriateness to that, deflating as it may be. Tom Riker thought the righteousness of his cause would see him through, but in the end, he's stuck in a life sentence in a Cardassian labor camp, and who knows if anyone will remember his name.

Stray observations:

- Oh, and Tom kissed Kira before he went away for good. It's sweet, and the episode sets up their attraction early on, but it still seems less romantic, and more like a contractual obligation.
- Tom reveals himself by pulling off a third of his beard to reveal a clearly villainous goattee. Some things never change.
- "You're trying to be a hero. Terrorists don't get to be heroes." Great line from Kira. I wish the episode had found a way to show us this more, rather than just have her come out and say it, but it's still a great line.

“Fascination” (season three, episode 10; originally aired)*In which everyone is in the mood for love...*

Ah, the classic “love potion” episode, where characters who normally wouldn’t dream of approaching one another suddenly develop passionate attachments designed to evaporate before the end credits. There’s no actual potion in “Fascination,” just Lwaxana Troi sending off empathic hot flashes due to a bad case of the made-up flu, but the principle remains the same: a large chunk of the show’s ensemble is going to embarrass themselves horribly, there’s going to be a lot of awkwardness, and maybe some groping, all of it played for laughs.

I’ll admit to not being a huge fan of the device, primarily because it’s so lightweight. Romantic entanglements on a show are only fun to watch if there is actual consequence behind them, and while Bashir explains that all of the temporary infatuations are based on some deeply buried subconscious desire, he immediately follows that up with, “Best not to think about it.” So none of these means anything. That can be enjoyable in its own way, and this isn’t a terrible episode by any means, but it did end up feeling fairly pointless to me by the end.

It’s mostly because I hate laughter, really, because if you can get past the automatic cringe factor of Jake hitting on Kira, or Vedek Bareil aggressively pursuing Dax, there are some funny bits here. I did chuckle; I’m not made of stone. But the joke of someone being really, really into someone who isn’t into them in any way really only has one note, and that note gets creepy really fast. As a kid, I couldn’t stand Pepe Le Pew cartoons because they always played like gore-free horror shorts to me: Horrible monster pursues terrified victim until victim is forced to capitulate to the fell creature’s desire. Yes, the “monster” was an animated skunk with an outrageous French accent, but he was still a jerk, and that kind of aggressiveness never struck me as all that funny, especially when you take into account just how frightened his targets always seemed to be. None of the targets of unwanted affection in “Fascination” are scared, exactly (although Dax comes close, and Keiko looks like she’s about to shriek when Quark briefly accosts her), but the premise of the humor is misguided. There’s only one joke, and it never varies; the only time it really works is Sisko’s party, when everyone comes crashing together. Oh, and Kira and Bashir’s aggressive make-out is amusing because they’re both into it, even

while realizing they probably shouldn't be. That creates a chance for some good physical comedy, and both actors go to it with gusto.

The other couples, though... When Jake turns his attentions to Kira, we're supposed to believe it's part of his coping mechanism for dealing with his breakup with Marta. Clearly something is wrong, though, because as goofy and childish as Jake can sometimes be, he's not a fool; the fact that Kira is very clearly not into him (and good lord is that scene hard to watch) should've ended his crush, or at the very least given him pause before going after her again. But instead, he runs around the station trying to find her. That's fine for a completely non-threatening 16-year-old, but when Bareil gets into the game, deciding he and Dax are made for each other, it's no longer amusing. Bareil overdoes the goofiness, but even with that, his constant attempts at physical contact are painful to watch. Then Dax starts groping Sisko. The actors do their best, but the material doesn't have anywhere to go. The only drama comes from waiting to see who'll be next to fall, and hoping someone will figure out the problem before the station descends into a giant orgy.

For a Lwaxana Troi episode, there's surprisingly little of the lady, for good and for ill. In her first appearance on the show ("**The Forsaken**"), her scenes with Odo were a highpoint; they started off much in the same vein as the romances do in this episode (which makes sense—not only is Lwaxana making everyone hot for each other, she's giving them her technique), but by the end, Troi's openness and willingness to accept just about anything won the shapeshifter over. Given that Odo's clearly pining for Kira, who just as clearly has no idea and is still with Bareil, now would seem a perfect time for Lwaxana to swoop in. But while Lwaxana stays with Odo in every scene they share, she's not truly present. Maybe it's the sickness taking it out of her, or the way the episode is shaped, but it's easy to forget she's even around, and apart from being the root cause of the craziness, she's not particularly relevant to the story. Which is good and bad; good because too much Lwaxana can be tiresome, but bad because without her yearning for Odo to ground the premise, there are no stakes, and no real drama. There's a sweet moment at the end, when Lwaxana tells Odo she knows he's attracted to Kira, because she understands hopeless yearning, but it would've been nice to get something like this sooner. Odo's crush, in its realness, can be funny and sweet and melancholy all at once. Bareil groping Dax has maybe one level to it, if that.

Which means we need to look elsewhere if we want to find any sincerity in this hour at all, and that leaves us with O'Brien, visiting Keiko and Molly for the first time in months. As is so often the case with O'Brien and Keiko stories, this one tries to say some fairly complex and honest things about relationships, and while Keiko comes off as a more of the bad guy than usual, it still fundamentally demonstrates the requirements of a real marriage: two people, compromising again and again. O'Brien is hoping for a magical two days of station time with his family, but when his wife and daughter arrive, Molly is sick and Keiko is stressed. There's an inevitability to this that makes it more resonant than a hundred of Lwaxana's empathic mindwipes, and it only gets worse when Keiko tells O'Brien that she'll need to be on Bajor for a few months longer than they'd originally planned. Here it gets a little mean, as O'Brien is frustrated about the increased time away, and Keiko is bothered by his frustration—this should be an even argument, but given the couples' history, it's easy to read Keiko's response as ungenerous. But then, it's not like O'Brien is behaving like a prince.

In the end, the two make peace, O'Brien apologizes for being insensitive, and Keiko wears the red dress he likes so much. It's a nice reminder of the value and solidity of actual relationships amid all the madness. The fact that all the crushes we see are driven by at least some residual feeling doesn't bode well for Kira and Bareil, unless it's irrelevant, which it probably is. (The idea that Dax is in some way attracted to Sisko is just strange, considering he's constantly calling her "Old Man.") "Fascination" is lightweight, fitfully amusing entry that's nowhere as bad as it could've been, but will still be easy to forget in the morning.

Stray observations:

- All of this takes place during the Bajoran Gratitude Festival. I appreciate how consistently the show brings in Bajoran culture; it's always kind of goofy, but it helps add texture to the world, and the actors (Nana Visitor especially) commit to it.
- Hana Hatae, the little girl who plays Molly, is just ridiculously cute.
- Avery Brooks' various facial expressions as Dax gropes him are spectacular, and go a long way toward making those scenes work.

Next week: We dive into the time travel well with parts one and two of "Past Tense."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Past Tense, Part I”/ “Past Tense, Part II”

Zack Handlen

10/11/12 10:00AM

“Past Tense, Part I” (season 3, episode 11; originally aired 1/2/1995) and “Past Tense, Part II” (season 3, episode 12; originally aired 1/9/1995)

In which Sisko travels through time, and takes the law into his own hands...

The original **Star Trek** takes place in the 23rd century. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* takes place a century later, which makes it roughly three hundred years from where we are right now. Given the amount of social upheaval and technological development required to get us from the point A of the present to the point B of *Trek*’s fictional future, this temporal distance is a smart move. Backstory or mythology on a show is almost always better if you can keep the specifics fairly flexible, and while *DS9* certainly has its share of definite history, as with all *Trek* shows leading up to *Enterprise*, there’s no real effort put in to pinning down how us poor, messy humans ended up halfway across the galaxy. It’s never been a question all that relevant to the franchise. On the original series, every so often Kirk or Spock or McCoy would mention something from Earth’s past (like **the Eugenics Wars**), but

only if it was relevant to the plot, and there was never enough information to piece together an indisputable timeline of events. This is all to the good; the show was about our future, not its past, and the more effort writers make to pin everything down, the more easily it'll stop making sense.

The time-traveling two parter “Past Tense”—which has Sisko, Bashir, and Dax getting beamed back to the San Francisco of 2024—tries to fill in some of the blanks. It's a risky move, and there's all the padding and awkward structuring that so often haunts two-parter on the series; in addition, it takes some goofy plotting to throw Sisko and the others into the past (O'Brien gives us a wad of techspeak which translates to “Just 'cause”). But while these episodes are imperfect, there's more than enough good to outweigh the clumsiness. Because yes, trying to delve too much into what happened before can be a recipe for disaster; the past is by necessity dramatically static, which makes it hard to generate much tension from it. At the same time, by picking a year so relatively close to our own (three decades when the episode first aired, a mere ten years now), the writers are afforded an opportunity to deal with social issues which, even when clothed in the veil of genre metaphor, still feel immediate and resonant. *Trek* has done a number of “social issue” episodes over the years—some effective, most laughably heavy-handed—but there's a rawness, a directness, to “Past Tense” that makes it seem fresh. It makes sense, too. *DS9* has already demonstrated its willingness to show the dark underbelly of Roddenberry's utopia; of course it would be the show to give us the hell necessary to achieve paradise.

The first part of “Past Tense” is almost entirely set-up. First, we're given a reason why Sisko, Bashir, Dax, Kira—well, okay, everyone but Quark—need to take a trip on the *Defiant*. The Ferengi still manages to get a cameo in when he contacts Sisko to ask for a favor for the Grand Nagus, however. It's an odd exchange, given that it has basically nothing to do with the rest of the episode. If I had to guess, I'd say the writers were just looking for way a to shoehorn Shimerman in, if only briefly.

The truth is, though, everything about the cold open is on the clumsy side. The sudden conference on Earth, the magical chronitons which just happen to be passing through the solar system when Sisko and the others step onto the transporter, the fact that Odo and Kira and O'Brien are all aboard; none of this makes for a dealbreaker, but it's funny how sharply it contrasts with the effectiveness of the part of the story set in 2024. This persists through both episodes, actually, as the team left behind on the *Defiant* struggle to find some way to rescue their missing friends. These scenes aren't actively

painful, apart from Kira and O’Brien’s ill-advised trip to Stereotypeville (i.e., San Francisco of the 1960s, where, of course, they run into hippies and a rocking van), and the moment when O’Brien discovers that Sisko and Bashir have inadvertently changed the past enough to eliminate the entire existence of the Federation is appropriately chilling. It’s just that, apart from making sure we know the time travelers have a way back home, there’s no need for any of this. The dramatic tension of the episode arises from the ugliness of the past, and every brief foray into the “present” is a pleasant, but unnecessary distraction.

It’s not hard to guess why the show needs these scenes, just as it’s no huge surprise that there’s a five minute segment of the second episode which seems to exist solely to give Clint Howard a paycheck. Two-parters are tough to build, and I’d bet even if you stripped out most (or all) of the Kira and O’Brien scenes, you’d still have too much content for a single episode. Normally I’d be more critical of this, but the superfluous elements of “Past Tense” are easier to stomach than usual for a couple of reasons. For one, as I may have mentioned before, I like all of these characters, and I enjoy spending time with them. While the exchanges on the *Defiant* aren’t where the action is, watching Odo, O’Brien, and Kira try and work through the problem has a certain charm. Sure, you know they won’t find the answer until Sisko and the others get through their own, and the scenes are mostly a lot of techspeak without much weight, but it’s better than some of the chaff that filled the spare minutes back on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

The other reason to accept all of this is that the San Francisco segments really do need all the time they’re given, and trying to cram all of this into a single episode, even if that meant losing the fat, would’ve been a mistake. The power of “Past Tense” comes from watching Sisko and Bashir struggle to deal with the horrific social conditions of the 21st century. When they arrive in the city, groggy from the trip and minus their com-badges (which are never seen again; no one seems to be concerned about potential anachronisms), the captain and the doctor are picked up by a pair of police officers who immediately arrest them for vagrancy and lack of proper identification. Vin (played by professional “That guy!” Dick Miller, who gets a lot to work with and makes the most of it), the more dismissive of the officers, assumes our heroes are “dims,” which we eventually learn is a slang term for mentally handicapped individuals incapable of holding down long-term jobs. The episode loves its slang terms—in addition to “dims,” there are also “gimmies,” clear-headed and able-bodied people

looking for jobs, and “ghosts,” the violent, thieving folks who prey on the less fortunate. Dim, gimmie, or ghost, all the disenfranchised or down on their luck are herded into the slum-like, hopelessly overcrowded Sanctuaries, where they are left to rot.

This is where Sisko and Bashir end up, but not before Sisko gets a look at the date, and realizes they’re just a few days away from the Bell Riots of 2024. Inspired loosely by the 1971 riot at Attica Prison, the uprising is/was the inevitable outcome of a large group of desperate men and women forced to endure impossible circumstance. It’s notable in Sisko’s time for being the turning point when the United States government decided to finally deal with the social problems it had been avoiding and putting off for over a century. This change was driven by the martyrdom of Gabriel Bell, a Sanctuary citizen who helped take a group of government workers hostage during the riots. Bell managed to keep all of this hostages alive during the conflict, and was shot dead for his troubles when the army finally shut the crisis down. When the truth about his actions, and his murder, became more widely known, the public outcry led to change, which ultimately led to every problem getting solved and the creation of the Federation.

This is a little much; “Past Tense” shorthands decades worth of social progress and slow, hard-won change into a single event, and while it’s important for the episode to work (in that we need to believe it’s crucial for both the hostages to live and Bell to die), it still requires a certain amount of suspension of disbelief to accept everything Sisko is laying down. Still, time travel plots have a tendency to pivot on one crucial event, so it’s not like this is without precedent. As well, the Bell crisis never plays out in the way you’d expect. The first big surprise comes at the end of the first part, when Sisko and Bashir are pulled into a fight, and a stranger comes to their aid. The stranger is gut-stabbed by a ghost named B.C. (Frank Military, which is a really great name), and dies due both to his wound and the lack of access to medical care. And wouldn’t you just know it: The dead man is Gabriel Bell.

Bell’s death gives Sisko and Bashir a more compelling reason to stick around than simply, “We have no other choice”; one of this two-parter’s strengths is that the way the drama comes not from obvious contrivance (we know the Federation is going to cease to exist, just as we know Sisko, Bashir, and Dax will find their way back to the present), but from the suffering of the people Sisko and Bashir meet. The plot forces our heroes to become directly involved with the events of the riots, and while it may be more than a little contrived, the end result is worth it. There are a few tense moments in “Part

It” when it seems like B.C. is going to shoot Vin (who’s one of the hostages, along with most every other Sanctuary personnel we’ve seen), but for the most part, the episode isn’t about suspense. There’s no serious question that Sisko, pretending to be Bell, will pull this off, and he never has to make any intense decisions to bring everything together. This isn’t a **“City On The Edge Of Forever”** scenario where a hero is forced to surrender to the tide of fate. It’s more a way to spend time with people, get to know some of them, and draw some inevitable comparisons between the world we see on screen and our own.

There isn’t that much difference. Oh sure, there’s a bit of sci-fi thrown in to make sure we remember it’s 2024, but the core concepts are distressingly familiar: overworked bureaucrats punished for trying to make a difference, the indigent and struggling forced into environments where crime and drug use seem like the only possible exit, a wealthy elite watching from a distance, convinced that the those in need are somehow responsible for their suffering. It’s a little heavy-handed, but the directness is part of what makes the best sections of these two episodes so powerful. For once, cloaking modern social ills in a tasty sci-fi snack doesn’t come off as cloying or cowardly. The anger and frustration that drives both hours isn’t subtle, but it is real, and often affecting, serving once again to remind us just how great *DS9* is at giving a damn. Both Bashir and Sisko frequently comment on the ugliness around them, and Avery Brooks in particular is on fire; there are moments in the second half when he seems to forget his Sisko self and give over completely to passion and fervor of the moment. And it is awesome when he does.

While all this is going on—while Sisko, Bashir, and a bunch of the ghosts (including B.C.) are holding hostages and trying to persuade the government to accede to their (pretty quixotic) demands—Dax is hanging out with the rich folks, trying to find out what happened to her friends. When Bashir and Sisko were picked up by the security personnel, Dax was rescued by a very rich, very white television executive, who immediately spirits her to his home, allows her use of his equipment, dresses her in pretty clothes and takes her to parties. This is intended as a commentary on how the Caucasian Dax would be treated differently than the darker-skinned Sisko and Bashir; I’m not sure that entirely works (the way it’s framed, it looks like Dax was beamed to a different area than the other two, and her rescue was more a matter of being in the right place at the right time), but the fact that’s it intentional but not underlined is a smart choice. More importantly, the ease with which Dax is able to get

what she wants and move through the upper echelons of society, while Sisko and Bashir struggle to get breakfast, is telling.

Most impressive of all is the way “Past Tense” routinely avoids providing us with easy villains. Dax’s rescuer, Chris Brynner (Jim Metzler), could’ve been a corrupt, hypocritical ass; I was half-expecting him to make a move on Dax at some point, given how helpful and friendly he was. But he never does, and while Dax meets a few people in his company who fit the stereotype of the ugly rich, Brynner himself is courteous and helpful, even allowing Sisko and the others to get the stories of the citizens of the Sanctuary out onto the network. He’s just too accepting, too oblivious of the problems, in the same way the bureaucrats Sisko and Bashir meet vaguely know that something is wrong, but feel powerless to change it. Even B.C., the violent creep who keeps on about how much he really wants to shoot somebody, has a decent heart underneath it all; you get the sense that with some direction and some hope, he might’ve amounted to something more. While the episodes aren’t any kind of dry polemic or sociological study, the writers do make the effort to show how this kind of crushing poverty comes about, and how hellishly difficult it can be to change anything. The people aren’t villains or conspiring to destroy each other. They’re just regular people being ground under the wheels of a machine they no longer even see.

It’s not hopeless, of course; this isn’t *The Wire*, and given that this *is* time travel, the happy ending is already built in. But “Past Tense” works by addressing the ugliness of a broken system without pretending it’s anything but hellish; and it also succeeds in providing some hope for change, even while acknowledging that change always has a cost. There are people in the episode who realize the error of their ways by the end, and their ability to change speaks to the fundamental optimism of this series, and of all *Trek*. Vin, who is suspicious of Sisko and Bashir from the start, and openly contemptuous of the rest of the Sanctuary denizens, is finally won over by the decency and humanity of the people he sees, and by something as simple as a conversation about baseball. It’s a transition which should be predictable to the point of formula, but somehow isn’t. Miller doesn’t shy away from making the character cantankerous (though still charming, in that Dick Miller way), so that his eventual conversion doesn’t play out as an inevitability. In the end, that may be “Past Tense”’s greatest success: It’s about history, but it also serves as a reminder that nothing is set in stone.

Stray observations:

- I also took Dax's success as evidence at how much better she was at adapting to new situations; considering how many memories she has, I doubt anything much surprises her.
- Sisko's reference to the "Starfleet Temporal Displacement Policy" made me laugh. Given how many times various *Enterprise* crew members have gotten their DeLorean on, it's no surprise that somebody decided it would be worth setting up some rules. Of course, those rules would be nearly impossible to reinforce, but it's still a nice idea.
- "It's not your fault things are the way they are." "Everybody tells themselves that. And nothing ever changes." A great exchange between Bashir and a social worker.
- "I thought we were on the same side here!" "We are, but you get on my nerves and I don't like your hat."—Sisko, on edge.
- I didn't even mention Michael Webb (Bill Smitrovich), the nice guy who works with Sisko and Bashir, and gets killed for his troubles. He was good.
- While I like how the second episode shortcuts Sisko and the others getting back home (we know Kira has found Dax, but the last we see of Earth, Sisko and Bashir are talking with Vin), it emphasizes how extraneous the Kira/O'Brien stuff is.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Life Support”/“Heart Of Stone”

Zack Handlen

10/18/12 10:00AM

“Life Support” (season 3, episode 13; originally aired 1/30/1995)

In which Vedek Bareil says goodbye...

So long, Bareil. You’ll be—well, maybe not “missed,” exactly, but you were certainly not evil, you were definitely more likeable than Kai Winn, and, hey, you made Kira happy, and we do like Kira. As character deaths go, yours was well-handled. There was no warning this was coming; the last we saw of Bareil, he was putting the moves on Dax because of an empath’s influence, which means we had no real idea what was going on with him. According to the always useful *Memory Alpha*, the producers decided to sacrifice his character this episode because they weren’t happy with his relationship with Kira, and they weren’t sure what to do with him anymore. That’s not the most organic reason to off a recurring character, and at times, “Life Support” struggles a little with the import of what it’s doing, especially balanced against what must be one of the more ill-advised B-story pairings I’ve ever seen. There’s also the fact that despite his importance to the plot, this isn’t really a “Bareil” episode at all (if such a thing were possible); the focus is on Bashir, as he struggles to save a life, then has to deal with

the consequences of success. But it's not as though the vedek was ever a central figure to the series in any meaningful way—he was a symbol at best and worst—and the episode does take his passing seriously. I may not miss him much, but I did find myself mourning him.

About that B-story, though... Yowza. We might as well get that out of the way first, although if I truly wanted to capture the inanity of this episode's structure, I'd start in about Bareil's accident, and his condition, and the stakes of his situation, and then I'd keep interrupting myself to talk about Jake Sisko's dating life. Because that's roughly how the episode itself plays out: On the one hand, you've got a guy struggling to stay alive long enough to complete the most important act of his career; on the other hand, you've got Jake going on a disastrous double date with Nog. The intention is to lighten the mood of Bareil's downward-sloping narrative through line, but the result is pure tonal whiplash. It's not enough to sink the episode on the whole, but it's grating and noticeable, in a way that effective storytelling shouldn't be. (Unless the writer in question is trying to prove some kind of point with the gear-shifting, which is definitely not the case here.)

How does Jake's wild night play out of context, though? It's all right, raising questions about tolerance and friendship which the show has dealt with before, and recognizing the challenges inherent in a friendship between two sentient beings from different backgrounds, however well-intentioned those beings might be. Jake and Nog's friendship has always been an asset to the show, with Cirroc Lofton's low-key naturalism contrasting well against Aron Eisenberg's expansive (and, let's be honest, occasionally grating) performance.

My only real criticism is that the episode treats Nog's culturally formed contempt for women as a kind of "belief" that should be respected under the general rubric of open-mindedness. The basic philosophy that Sisko gives Jake is a good one: The only way to get by in this world is to accept that other people won't always agree with you, and while you should stand up for your own beliefs, you can't just run around shouting at everyone who believes differently. It's just that the kind of male chauvinism Nog displays during the awful double date is more a matter of Nog trying to force his beliefs on others than it is Jake being insensitive; he ruins an outing which he forced his way into in the first place. Plus, if Nog really does want to continue dealing with non-Ferengi, he needs to learn that openly insulting someone before demanding she cuts your food isn't going to make him a lot of friends. The core of Sisko's message—patience, compassion, understanding that just because you

think your way is right doesn't mean it is—is good. But set against Nog's behavior, it feels like mistaking one issue (misogyny) for another (tolerance).

Bareil's story is more palatable; its core is based on the conflict between Bashir's patient-focused approach to healing and the broader concerns of both Kai Winn and the patient in question. Winn and Bareil arrive at DS9 with secret plans to meet with a Cardassian legate named Turrel. The goal is an official peace treaty between Bajor and Cardassia; Winn isn't a huge fan of the idea (given her belligerent, isolationist past this isn't a huge surprise), but Bareil has been pushing for it, and is, in fact, largely responsible for this meeting. But things go a bit pear-shaped when the shuttle Winn and Bareil ride in on has a breakdown, and there's some exploding, and Bareil winds up horribly, mortally injured. Bashir does all he can, but ultimately is forced to admit failure.

Of course, the vedek isn't quite dead, not yet, but it's a shocking way to start the episode, particularly because Bareil is just minor enough of a character for his survival not to be assured. This is further reinforced by the fact that, while he manages to make it through most of the hour (albeit suffering most of the way), Bareil does, in fact, die in the end. It's the only natural conclusion to this arc: the whole moral thrust of "Life Support" is the line between healing the injured and sustaining a life beyond all reasonable expectations of survival. For Bareil to walk out at the end comparatively unscathed would've been a horrible cheat; for him to survive as some kind of monotoned husk (er, more monotoned, anyway) would've been agonizing—and unjustified. The hour finds drama in Bashir's attempts to balance his role as physician against the practical demands of culture and society, and for this to work, for both his quiet anger and Kira's tearful goodbye to have meaning, there need to be consequences. I've complained in the past about television plots which attempt to mine pathos out of grief, all the while reassuring us that this grief is only illusory; that death is just another kind of bad dream, troubling in the moment but destined to evaporate on waking. This episode commits to its premise, and for that alone, it's commendable.

To get critical about *how* it commits, I'd say it's somewhat successful. While Bareil is not a dynamic figure on the show (both in terms of the performance, and in terms of how he fits in with everyone else; the whole point of the character is that he's a pleasant, calm, vaguely mystical fellow), he doesn't need to be for "Life Support" to be effective. In fact, if he was more interesting, he'd probably distract from Bashir and Winn's sparring, which is very exciting and dramatic and deeply satisfying.

Which would've made for a different episode entirely. A better one, maybe, as it's sad to see a character go out in an hour which so clearly has little use for him—as a symbol, he matters, but as an individual, he's a McGuffin designed to facilitate the responses of others. Which he does quite well, thankfully. This is another great Bashir episode (he's got McCoy's tenacity with Crusher's balance, which is a change from the callow, charming idiot Alexander Siddig played in the first season), and there's a powerful idea in all of this about the limits of medical science, and the danger of mistaking our own needs for the needs of others.

All of this largely comes through, and, again, to see Bashir repeatedly take down Winn and her selfishness is, I'm not going to lie, awesome. As an added bonus, the Kai herself has calmed down since the last time we saw her; she's still cold and insincere, but you get the impression that winning her life's ambition has actually made her slightly more reflective. At the very least, she has no real need to scheme against anyone now. Her arguments with Bashir over Bareil—Bashir wants to put Bareil in stasis, Winn desperately needs him to complete the negotiations with the legate—is more driven by her insecurity and, as Bashir rightly points out, cowardice. She's a bit less evil, which is nice, and that makes the whole thing more interesting, allowing us to focus more on Bareil's slow decay and Bashir's desperation, and less on wondering if Winn was the one who sabotaged the shuttle, and if she has some sort of master plan. (She didn't, and she doesn't.)

While I appreciate the reason the writers settled on killing a recurring character, the way Bareil is used here is brutal, going against the show's rough, but essentially humane, approach to its stories and its world. As mentioned, he's a prop; the episode relies on our knowledge of the character from previous appearances to give emotional weight to his condition, which sort of works, but he's still scripted as a guest player. The intent is to put as much focus on Bashir as possible, and it's a tricky balance to pull off. I'm not really sure there is a better way to accomplish this storyline, with these goals, and "Life Support" is effective enough that I certainly wouldn't want to wish it out of existence. But it's only in the final scenes, as Kira says goodbye to her comatose former lover, that you realize what's actually happening, and that's a shame. Maybe if the hour hadn't spent a quarter of its time teaching Jake a valuable lesson about tolerating bigotry, it might have been more successful.

Stray observations:

- Normally, any “accident” which leads to a character’s death raises suspicions, but the episode does a good job of getting that out of the way straight off. But then, this is the show that justified two episodes worth of time travel with “freak chroniton particle interference,” so obviously it knows its business.
- Nog’s extreme dickishness—and Jake’s utter astonishment in the face of such dickishness—doesn’t make sense when you consider how long they’ve been friends. We’ve seen Jake and Nog talk about girls before. Surely the fact that Nog thinks women should be seen and not heard would’ve come up. Maybe he’s struggling with insecurity, or maybe this is just his way of trying to be more of a Ferengi (which could, theoretically, lead to the totally awesome Nog plot coming up next), but neither are suggested by the script.
- “And doctor, I won’t forget what you’ve said here.” “Neither will I.”
- Quark made a dish called “Kai Winn.” It looks awful.

“Heart Of Stone” (season 3, episode 14; originally aired 2/6/1995)

In which Odo breaks his...

There was a moment in “Heart Of Stone” when I thought the writers had gone too far. Kira is trapped in a slowly growing prison of rock, and Odo’s efforts to save her have all failed. She pleads with him to leave her; the caves they’re in are unstable, and could collapse at any moment. He refuses. She asks why, and he finally comes out with it: “I’m in love with you.” It’s a lovely piece of acting from Rene Auberjonois, full of terror and embarrassment and conviction, and a fine payoff to the hints we’ve been getting about his feelings all season. That’s not the part that bothered me. What bothered me was Kira’s response: “I’m in love with you, too.”

“A-ha!” I thought (because all critics think like a Hardy Boy). “They’re trying to push forward a relationship without doing the proper groundwork. Nice try, fellas, but I’m on to your tricks! Points off for cheating, and if it happens again, I’m telling my dad. He knows lawyers.”

Really, I was mostly just disappointed. Up until that point, “Heart Of Stone” had been shaping up to be one of my favorite episodes of the season so far, with equally strong A- and B-plots, a simple but suspenseful science-fiction twist, and a showcase for Odo and his difficulties with socializing. But for most of the episode, Nana Visitor’s performance had been a little off; she’s always a passionate actress, but here that passion crosses over the line into mild haminess. That wouldn’t have been enough to derail the proceedings entirely, but it’s fairly distracting, and for Kira to respond to Odo’s pained declaration of love with her own feelings in a way that exactly matched what he most (and, given the circumstances, least) wanted to hear makes the distraction too large to be ignored. It gave me something to write about, but it hurts what was, on average, working rather well, and that’s always a let-down.

I needn’t have worried, although all things considered, I’m glad I did, because that made the eventual reveal all the more striking. See, my instinct that Kira would never tell Odo “I love you” so baldly and easily was actually built into the episode itself; Odo reacts with the same suspicion, explaining (in one of the character’s more heartbreaking monologues) how his abilities as an impartial observer meant he already knew Kira did not return his feelings. Which meant that the Kira supposedly trapped in stone wasn’t really Kira at all. I’d briefly thought something might be hinky earlier in the episode, when Odo and Kira split up, and then Odo received a distress signal from her almost immediately after, but I’d forgotten all about that. “Heart Of Stone” managed to pull the wool completely over my eyes, and it did so with a character whose abilities had already been established at the start of the season. In other words, all the clues were there, and I don’t feel cheated by the twist; the episode got me good.

Even better, I’m not sure I can decide which storyline I enjoyed more. While Odo’s struggling to save Kira, Nog pays a visit to Sisko. He’s got a bag full of latinum, and a request: His coming of age ceremony has passed, he’s now considered an adult by his culture, and he wants to apprentice to Sisko. This would mean joining Starfleet Academy, which no Ferengi has ever done before, and Sisko is understandably confused. As is the audience. Nog has never been the most user-friendly character. He’s always a little off-putting, a little aggressive, a little weird, and the main reason he’s been tolerable at all is his friendship with Jake; the fact that Jake (a good kid) would like hanging out with someone so shrill and loud meant there had to be something decent in Nog on some level. That, combined with

his occasional flashes of decency are enough to make him not entirely despicable, but that still doesn't make him someone you'd imagine having much place in the Federation.

Sisko decides to investigate, because he is a much better man than I am, and with some help from Dax, he determines that, if nothing else, Nog is a determined enough worker to qualify for cadetship. But determination isn't entirely enough, and it's important to Sisko that he understand why Nog is suddenly so keen. After dealing with Quark this long, it's not hard to sympathize; Quark isn't a monster, but his entire life philosophy is based around finding the best profit in any given situation, and as Ferengi go, he's actually pretty laid-back about it. If Nog is doing all of this just to make some cash on the side, or as part of some scheme, or to get back at someone, Sisko needs to know, so he can put a stop to it here and now.

This leads to the best scene of the episode, as Sisko tries to trick Nog into giving up his ambitions in order to force him to reveal what's really driving him. As I've said, Nog has been off-putting in the past, but he's amazing here, with Eisenberg rising to the occasion admirably. Nog wants to go to Starfleet Academy because he wants a better life for himself. His father, Rom, is a genius with machines. But Rom is terrible at business, and because of how the Ferengi operate, this means he'll always be at the mercy of his brother's insults, stuck repairing equipment behind the bar and toadying to someone with a slightly keener instinct at cheating strangers. Nog has watched this happen again and again, and while he can't save his dad, he wants out. He knows he shares his father's poor business skills (and given how generally inept he's been at dealing with people, this makes sense) as well as the old man's gift for engineering, and the only way the latter will ever be more important than the former is if he opens up his horizons.

That's a lumpy summary of an absolutely terrific monologue, and it's exciting because it's unexpected (I'd heard once, a while back, that Nog eventually joined Starfleet, but I'd largely forgotten), and because it's triumphant in a way that doesn't come across as forced or sentimental. We've seen Quark abuse Rom dozens of times, to the point where it's hard to get bothered by it; for Nog to comment on it changes the whole dynamic, and forces us to look at both him and his father in a different light. And for him to use what's largely been a running gag as a serious motivation for real change in his life is an unexpected, and entirely welcome, pleasure. Characters often deteriorate as a series goes on,

whether by authorial intention or just basic entropy, and it's wonderful to see one actively work to better his lot. It feels revolutionary, in an enthusiastic, respectful, and utterly adamant kind of way.

Odo and Kira's story (which is largely Odo's story) doesn't allow for the same transcendence, which is fine; as a shapeshifter, Odo's sanity requires rigid adherence to a core identity, and any real course-altering from him would be unsettling at best, terrifying at worst. But in his attempts to struggle what he believes to be the woman he loves from a death trap, he's forced to reveal a few more pieces of himself. Early in the episode, he complains to Kira that she didn't ask his opinion about a routine matter on their recent trip to Bajor. It's a petty, if understandable, concern, and the script goes on to drop reminders of just how difficult it is for Odo to make himself known outside of his life as "constable" — how much of Odo's conversation relies on gruff responses, knowing looks, and cynicism. These traits are undeniably parts of who he is, but they aren't all of him, and the non-professional side to his personality must be feeling starved for attention, and maybe a little resentful at how easy everyone else seems to have it.

"Heart Of Stone" once again highlights Odo's position on the show as the self-aware outsider, the observer who understands humanoid folly largely because he believes himself separate from it. But of course he isn't, as his gradually rising panic demonstrates. The fake Kira trick works on him as well as us because it's so weirdly plausible; the idea that some random moon might have a bit of carnivorous geology on it isn't that far removed from a dozen other similar *Trek* premises. The rock doesn't have any personality, there's no complex concept to swallow, just a nasty trap that keeps growing no matter how hard Odo tries to break it. So he gets frustrated and scared, and as "Kira" becomes frightened, he tries to comfort her. This leads to a lot of "Odo doesn't know what to say, then talks about how he doesn't know what to say, then says something anyway" exchanges, in which the fake Kira is reduced to reassuring him as much as he's trying to reassure her.

It works beautifully, apart from the aforementioned overacting from Visitor which I'm going to assume is intentional. The build from concern to despair happens organically, so that when Odo's big confessional moment arrives, it doesn't seem like a stunt, or as though everything else in the episode was intended to get us to his line; it's merely the only thing he has left to say. The monologue about how he got his name is great (I love how Auberjonois always underplays this stuff; the speech itself is already well-written, but his matter-of-fact, somewhat desperate delivery makes it even better), and

then, finally, he has to admit the biggest secret he has left, believing that this will almost certainly be the last time he'll ever get a chance to express how he feels, even while he knows those feelings are unreciprocated.

But when Kira tells him she loves him back... there has to be a second when he believes her, right? Probably not much longer than that, but at least a second or two. But Odo's curse is that he's too smart, and too dependent on truth, to believe anything that's too good to be true. So he works it out in his head, explains his deductions, and forces the fake Kira to reveal herself as the female Changeling Odo met back at the start of the season. She's testing him to find out what keeps him on DS9; she believes Odo's attachment to Kira is stopping him from joining the rest of his people, but she's wrong. Odo's entire life has been a hard-fought battle of self-determination, and while the Changelings presented a serious blow to his identity, he remains thoroughly, unrelentingly himself. At his core is someone who does the right thing. Everything else, even what he feels for his closest friend, is secondary. At first, I didn't understand the connection between Odo's story and Nog's, but in retrospect, it's obvious: Both are characters intent on being themselves, no matter what the cost.

Stray observations:

- I already praised it, but Odo's speech about how he knows Kira doesn't love him is quietly, simply devastating.
- As if that wasn't enough: "She just said something I knew you would never say." "What's that?" "Just a slip of the tongue." The scene isn't even played with any particular emphasis! It's just Odo and Kira walking away, and all of a sudden your heart is on the floor, broken and everything.
- Also great: Rom basically telling Quark to go suck eggs when Quark tries to forbid Nog from going to the Academy. It's a rare win for the character, as well as being a sweet exchange between father and son.
- Odo turned himself into a force field. Which is cool.

Next week: Sisko has a date with "Destiny," and Grand Nagus Zek returns in "Prophet Motive."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Destiny”/“Prophet Motive”Zack Handlen10/25/12 10:00AM**“Destiny”(season three, episode 15; originally aired 2/13/1995)***In which Sisko has to decide what he feels about his...*

Prophecy is a lousy way to tell a story. This is a futile complaint, of course; by now, seers and sages and ancient texts are such a fundamental part of genre narratives that we just take their presence for granted, as though having someone wander by to spout vague metaphors about the direction of the plot were somehow a requirement. It isn't, nor should it be, and in practice, it's nearly always a weak way to foreshadow upcoming twists. The main conflict of prophecy—namely, the way it throws our notions of free will and autonomy into question, and why a god would find it necessary to provide a hint book to their followers—rarely comes into play. Instead, it's usually just, “You are the Chosen One!” and “We must stand by the silver tree on the last full moon of next month and spin thrice clockwise, or else all is lost,” or something equally arbitrary, although sometimes there's also violence.

Which explains why I wasn't very keen when I found out “Destiny” was about the Prophets and the messages they'd passed on to the Bajoran people, and Sisko's role in fulfilling those messages. By

now, I've come to trust *DS9* enough to know that it will find some interesting things to say about all of this, but that didn't make me any happier when Vedek Yarka (Erick Avari) shows up, warning of catastrophe. Arrangements have been made with the Cardassian government for a joint Cardassian-Bajoran effort to establish a communications relay which will work through the wormhole. To that end, two Cardassian scientists are headed to DS9 to work with Sisko, O'Brien, and the others. Yarka believes that Trakor's prophecy (his third, actually) warns of the dangers which lie ahead. There's a lot of metaphor about vipers and swords of stars and so forth, but, according to Yarka, it all boils down to this: if Sisko allows the Cardassians to go ahead with their mission, the wormhole will be destroyed.

The first thing Sisko argues is that Trakor warns of three vipers, and yet there are only two scientists scheduled to come aboard the station. Story-wise, this spells the inevitability of a third Cardassian showing up, thus throwing all of Sisko and Kira's doubts into question. (Even though it eventually turns out that the "vipers" probably weren't even Cardassians in the first place.) The prospect of an hour's worth of soul-searching, arguing over semantics, and ultimately proving that the religious fanatic was right all along isn't a promising one. That's the way this kind of plot nearly always goes, too; not necessarily because of any propagandist intent (I doubt the folks behind this show were trying to convince any of us that the Bajoran faith is the one true way), but because drama relies on forcing characters to deal with situations that push them out of their comfort zones. Few things would be more uncomfortable to Sisko than having to deal both with a potential intergalactic incident, as well as his role as the Emissary. If Yarka was simply categorically wrong about everything, it wouldn't be much of a conflict.

Thankfully, it's a bit more complicated than just "the crazy priest knows all." He doesn't even turn out to be that crazy, despite Odo's discovery that he was defrocked as a vedek after pushing his vision of the prophecy too hard. One of the elements that automatically makes *DS9*'s religious investigations more interesting is that they are, to an extent, verifiably true. The show hasn't really dealt with how proof changes the nature of faith, perhaps in part because it's not like Sisko brought a camcorder into the wormhole when he met the aliens who live there, but for the audience, it adds an extra layer when we know for a fact that there are beings in this universe who can see forward and backward and all the way through time. As Kira and Sisko discuss later in the episode, this adds a level of credence to the prophecies that they might not otherwise have had. There's still the problematic fact

that the words are vague, heavily metaphoric, and have been subject to dozens of different translations through the years, but that they end up having a connection to reality is both an affirmation of faith (after all, there are no definite facts in Sisko and Kira's final interpretation, just their belief) while still not violating the show's essentially rationalistic perspective. The implication being that yes, the unknowable exists, but its mysteries are likely more a function of the limitations of our own consciousness than anything magical or mystic.

I'm getting ahead of myself, though. The two—three, sir!—three Cardassians arrive, and, as one would expect, there are some tensions. Namely between O'Brien and Gilora Rejal (Tracy Scoggins), a Cardassian female who doesn't have much faith in the chief's engineering abilities. If you predict that O'Brien will stand up for himself, that the episode will do a sort of funny, sort of eye-roll inducing inversion of idiot sexism (in this case, on Cardassia, women think that men are the ones who can't do maths!), and that O'Brien's backbone will be misinterpreted as some kind of sexual come-on by Rejal, well, you've watched a television show before, so congrats. In truth, this isn't as terrible as it might be, since O'Brien is such a terrific straight man; his pained reactions to both Rejal's dismissals and flirtation are quite funny. And the final exchange between them, as Rejal asks about O'Brien's wife and says she's a "lucky woman," is both inevitable and sincere. It's just that trying to expose our own culture's prejudices by swapping genders or race is rarely as effective or entertaining as writers seem to think. It can work, but too often, it's just a goofy attempt to laugh away a very real problem. This doesn't even have that much behind it. Ha-ha, different species are weird, but isn't it great to know that women are crazy in all of them?

Still, this is a minor subplot in an episode that's more focused on weightier matters. Inevitably, this means things can get somewhat ponderous; while the conflict which drives Kira and Sisko is a deep one, it's also a largely internal issue, which makes it more difficult to engage with. Kira is quickly convinced that Yarka was on to something, although her commitment to Sisko and her job prevent her from taking action on this. Sisko is more skeptical, but as the apparent evidence mounts, he starts to question his own prejudices, and how his desire not to be the Emissary may be shaping the way he looks at events.

All of this is intellectually interesting, and the actors do well by the material (Visitor's increasing awe around Sisko over the course of the episode is nicely done, and a good reminder of how important he

is to her people and her faith), but there's precious little drama in any of this. In a way, I like that; I expected the plot would have a lot of yelling and people storming off and the possibility of an intergalactic incident hovering over everything, but it's much more low-key. There's some tension when the relay system goes wrong, and a comet is inadvertently redirected to head towards the wormhole, but at no point do Sisko and the Cardassian scientists engage in heated philosophical discussions, and neither Kira nor Yarka (who spends most of the episode hanging out at the station off-screen) try and sabotage the mission. The wormhole is in danger; there's some stress about it; but ultimately, everything works out okay.

While I'm glad the episode avoids hitting the drama too hard—and I certainly don't think every episode needs to be about the end of the world or some equivalent calamity—this does make for an hour with curiously low stakes. Yes, the destruction of the wormhole would be catastrophic, and the sequence in which Kira and Sisko fly a shuttle through it to guide three pieces of the comet to the other side is intense enough, but this is a small part of the hour, and there's no growing sense of paranoia or danger as the prophet's words appear to come true. There's also the weird fact that a member of the Obsidian Order (the third Cardassian "scientist") tries to sabotage the mission, and nobody seems all that upset over it. Sure, there's some griping and stares, but the reveal comes so easily and immediately after the first sign of a problem that it robs the scenario of any suspense.

Maybe that's the point; maybe the writers are more concerned with Sisko's uncertainty than they are with politics. To that end, the episode has its moments. Sisko's situation is a unique one, and it isn't often dealt with on the show, so it's nice to see the episode try and deal with it head on. And there are some effective scenes. I especially liked the last conversation between Kira and Sisko when they both decide to reinterpret the prophecy in the light of new evidence. As I mentioned before, it's a nice way to allow for both skepticism and belief, and it's gratifying that "Destiny" doesn't insist you accept their interpretation. (I'm skeptical, although the fact that the Prophets literally exist changes things.) It simply presents how the characters would respond, and allows us to draw whatever conclusions we'd like.

Stray observations:

- “I assure you, I’m quite fertile.” Ha! Aliens! (I like how she seems to approach the situation logically, and then storms off humiliated, or something, because ha! Women!)
- The Obsidian Order is a lot less frightening than usual this week. They should get on that.

“Prophet Motive” (season three, episode 16; originally aired 2/20/1995)

In which Zek acts like Scrooge on Christmas morning...

Sometimes, comic relief works. It doesn’t always; in fact, the phrase probably makes anyone whose watched enough movies and TV to recognize it cringe, haunted by the memory of a thousand bad jokes and worse pratfalls. As general rule, whenever something is labelled by a viewer as comic relief, it’s not really doing its job—humor designed to lighten the mood, or enrich character dialogue, shouldn’t draw attention to itself, and when it does, that usually means it’s not working.

But sometimes, it works, and “Prophet Motive” is one of those times. It helps that nothing in the episode is supposed to be distracting us from more serious issues in the episode itself; by which I mean, Quark’s determination to figure out what has driven Grand Nagus Zek insane isn’t a secondary plot to Sisko running around, trying to save lives. Quark and Rom and the rest are the main focus, so the distracting gear-shifting is kept to a minimum. (The actual subplot, with Bashir dealing from the stress of being nominated for a major award, is mediocre stuff, but it doesn’t last very long.) It also helps that most of what is supposed to be funny here is funny, a subversive look at the Prophets through the eyes of a culture not particularly interested in vague religious awe.

The reason why it’s so funny? Stakes! In that the story has them. In case you’ve somehow missed everything I’ve written about the Ferengi before, the problem with the race as they were originally conceived on ***Star Trek: The Next Generation*** is that they were designed to be laughed at. Comical creations are one thing, but an entire race composed of punchlines is not a good idea, especially on a show which otherwise worked so hard to be respectful and compassionate to all kinds of made-up

species. (It didn't always succeed, but at least it usually tried. With the Ferengi, the writers and producers never bothered.) So, *DS9*'s choice to foreground the Ferengi was a daring one, and what's even more impressive is that this has basically paid off. Quark is as valuable to the show as anyone, and his small circle of family have been getting more interesting with each passing year. The difference between this and the cringe-inducing caricatures on *TNG* is that *DS9* actually makes an effort to take Quark, Rom, and Nog's concerns seriously. The writers may poke fun at Quark's greed and his less than honest business practices, but they're also not afraid to let him have his say. He has as much a right to happiness as anybody else, and that's a crucial distinction.

It's also what makes this episode so funny. The Grand Nagus arrives on the station, commandeers Quark's quarters, and sequesters himself for a week. When he comes out, he offers Quark a new set of Rules of Acquisition—only these rules are, well, nice. More than nice, they're generous, kind, and charitable to a fault, all things which are the exact opposite of what a Ferengi is supposed to be. As if that wasn't bad enough, Zek uses Quark's apartment as the headquarters of the Ferengi Benevolent Association, and sets to work trying to help as many strangers as he can. This unsettles Quark, to say the least, and he becomes determined to figure out just what sort of game Zek is playing. It has to be a game, right? The Grand Nagus would never make such a bold move without some kind of ulterior motive. Right?

The discovery of the new Rules, and Quark's desperate, failing attempts to reconcile them with his deepest beliefs, is delightful, as is Quark's ongoing horror of his leader's apparent change of heart. It's funny because Armin Shimerman (with assists from Max Grodénchik and Wallace Shawn) is very good at comic despair, but it's also funny because he absolutely means it—and it's impossible not to sympathize with him. This may be the episode's greatest joke. Everything Zek is doing should make him more likeable, a better person, someone who fits in more appropriately with a human value system. Yet it's unnerving to see the conniving, greedy so-and-so running around gleefully throwing around goodwill. It's not right, and, as with Quark, we want to know what drove this change. The most obvious assumption is that there's some kind of profit scheme at work, but that's so obvious it almost can't be the solution; in order to use that twist, and have the story be satisfying, the episode would've had to push it to a far extreme indeed, so far I'm not even sure it's possible.

“Prophet Motive” goes in a different direction when Quark breaks into Zek’s ship, and finds one of the Bajoran orbs. This is where things get really interesting. Putting together what he knows about Zek, and what he knows about the aliens who the Bajorans call the Prophets, Quark reasons that Zek had found the orb on Cardassia, and decided to use it to get in touch with the wormhole aliens in order to learn the future so he could exploit that knowledge. Instead, the Prophets changed him to make him more agreeable. When Quark takes Zek back into the wormhole and confronts the aliens directly, they explain that they didn’t like Zek’s avarice and his hunger for power; it made them uncomfortable, so they gave him a personality makeover.

Given that Zek’s transformation has so far been played with a light tone, it’s easy to miss how creepy this is, and what it says about Sisko’s old friends. When Sisko met up with the Prophets, he helped them grasp the linear nature of time, and gave them a greater appreciation of sentient life. When Zek met them, he got pushy; they didn’t like it; so they lobotomized him. That they not only have this power, but are completely willing to use it when faced with even a minor inconvenience, is startling. It changes the alien’s mystical nature and makes it a bit more Old Testament; or, if you like, a bit more akin to the little boy in *The Twilight Zone* episode “It’s A Good Life,” wishing people into the cornfield when they displease him. The aliens aren’t quite so callous, but that really makes it worse. They think they have a moral imperative to change who Zek is, because he’s “wrong.” There’s nothing worse than an apparently omniscient being with a god complex.

On the plus side, this forces Quark to do what he does best: defend himself, and his way of life. The speech he gives here isn’t nearly as angry as the speech he gave Sisko last season, but it’s still smart, and hard to argue against. As well, it serves the meta purpose of putting the Ferengi way of life in the best perspective for the audience as much as for the Prophets. He doesn’t build an airtight case or anything, but he does challenge us to rethink our assumptions (assumptions which, it’s worth pointing out, were essentially created on *TNG*): Why is the Ferengi drive for profit so wrong? They’re an ambitious race, but ambition has its place. It inspires us to better ourselves, to improve our situation and accomplish great things.

Something like that, anyway. It’s a good speech, and Quark wins the day, and Zek is restored to his normally cranky self. The sequence of the wormhole aliens talking to Quark through various cast members is a good one, as is Quark’s earlier encounter with the orb; the latter is quite a lot sillier, but

it's the right kind of silly, I think—just a little creepy and weird and never dull. The episode manages its tone well throughout, generating suspense and humor out of a familiar setup (character who always behaves one way shows up behaving exactly the opposite!), injecting some fun into one of the show's most pompous elements, and serving once more to prove Quark's value to the station, and the series. He stood his ground against the Prophets and convinced them to admit their mistake. The Ferengi are still comic, but for the most part, the laughs are with them, not at them.

Stray observations:

- There is an entire storyline about Bashir being up for the Carrington Award which is apparently some kind of inside joke about *TNG* once getting nominated for an Emmy. It's cute, but the plot itself is mildly amusing at best, and goes nowhere.
- I still get creeped out when we see Quark getting his ears fondled. It's weirdly pornographic.
- Well, Rom may be a nicer guy than his brother, but he still knows how to take advantage of opportunity when he sees it; the episode ends with a sweet moment between brothers, as Rom reveals he's managed to embezzle a large amount of money from the good ole F.B.A.
- The Prophets don't just change Zek; they devolve him back to an early state, when the Ferengi weren't so greedy. Makes you wonder what happened that forced them to change.

Next week: O'Brien has to deal with his role as a "Visionary," and Bashir is troubled by "Distinct Voices."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Visionary”/“Distant Voices”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[11/01/12 10:00AM](#)

“Visionary” (season three, episode 17; originally aired 2/27/1995)

In which O’Brien meets O’Brien, and all hell breaks loose...

If you want to get metaphysical for a moment, the god of *Star Trek* is terrifyingly soothing. You can argue that there is no such entity, or that I’m mistaking authorial intent for the will of the divine, but I think in this case, any distinction between the two is largely meaningless. *DS9* has its prophets (which are rational), but while those prophets can see through time, they rarely appear all that interested in controlling the outcome of events—that’s left up to the protagonists, and whatever benevolent force watches over all. Make no mistake, there has to be some kind of benevolent force at work here, or else everyone on the station should be hitting the Dabo tables every day for the rest of their lives. Sure, bad things happen to Sisko, O’Brien, Kira, and the rest all the time, but the way those things happen, and the number of times those seeming catastrophes wind up preventing far more serious damage down the line, is hard to ignore.

Take “Visionary.” (Gasp! Segue!) The episode begins mere moments after O’Brien was zapped with a mild case of radiation poisoning while doing routine maintenance work. According to Bashir, the injury is minimal, although he insists that O’Brien take some time off to recuperate. Which the chief begrudgingly does, setting up a dartboard in Quark’s and attempting (unsuccessfully) to convince Ferengi of the glories of the game. Then, suddenly, he finds himself standing across the promenade, watching himself have a conversation with Quark—something about Klingons wrecking the holosuites. As hallucinations go, this is decidedly unimpressive, as Bashir is quick to point out. (Man, these two

are fun, aren't they? It's solid writing how their relationship has gone from antagonistic to clearly warm and friendly, without ever losing the basic dynamic established at the start of the series.) Only, it's not a hallucination, as roughly five hours after the attack, Quark comes up to O'Brien to ask for a repair crew for the holosuites, and O'Brien looks over and sees himself, from the past, watching himself from the present. And then Quark sees the same thing. Something strange is going on.

It turns out O'Brien is time traveling, which, this being a science-fiction series, is probably not a stunning revelation. The rest of the episode has jumping from Point A to Point Q and back again, with little warning before each jump, and, at first, little explanation as to what's happening to the chief. But while Bashir eventually makes the connection between the radiation exposure and some stray tetrion particles floating around the station, nobody points out the increasingly obvious: O'Brien's jumps keep getting more and more story-relevant. At first, his ability to see what comes next means he can save himself from a nasty bruise when a fight breaks out in Quark's, but later, he witnesses his own death not once, but twice—and as if that wasn't enough, he also sees the destruction of the entire station. There's never any justification for this (unless I missed it), and there doesn't really need to be; this would be a boring, and eventually very, very depressing, episode if O'Brien's jumps were to one of the random, inconsequential moments that make up roughly 99 percent of our lives. (The percentage is probably lower for a major character in an ongoing television series, admittedly.) But it's hard to shake the feeling that something is guiding him. Sure, his second-to-last jump takes him to a point too late to actually understand what's happening, but it gives him the tools necessary to save the station—albeit to do so at a shocking cost.

You could say that O'Brien's malady (and surely Bashir must try and enter this one into the medical books) connects to what ultimately turns out to be the main crisis of the episode: The nefarious Romulans who, deciding that the Dominion is too big of a threat to withstand, are determined to destroy the wormhole, and DS9 along with it. See, the Romulans have a cloaked war bird circulating the station while a pair of Romulan investigators interrogate various members of DS9's crew for information about their experiences in the Gamma Quadrant. The latter is a front, presumably, and when O'Brien sees the station exploding and the wormhole collapsing, he's witnessing the culmination of the Romulans' real plan. The irony is that the Romulans are the reason O'Brien is time-jumping in the first place. Their ships run on a quantum singularity that—well, there's a lot of technobabble, but the basic idea is that the particles from the war bird's engines are reacting to the radiation in O'Brien's system, or something along those lines, turning him into an intermittent DeLorean. It's a clever way to connect the episode to the show's larger themes—namely, the looming Dominion threat—as well as make sure the time-jumps don't come across as completely random. Sure, there's still the incredible coincidence of O'Brien getting zapped with just the right kind of radiation right before the Romulans showed up, but it's more than we'd get in, say, an episode of [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#) that had a similar premise.

That's worth looking at more closely, because it's an indication of just how good the *DS9* writers have gotten at balancing the demands of a *Trek* show (semi-magic sci-fi stuff, single episode storylines, geek bait) with its own ongoing needs. The idea that drives "Visionary" is fine, but what makes the episode

so terrific is how that idea is integrated into the rest of the show, and all the various smart twists the writers find along the way. Like the way people start being ready for O'Brien to show up in the future; this makes perfect sense, and yet it's startling when it happens and makes the whole concept seem just that much more real. There's also the way the episode doesn't waste any time trying to pretend that fate is unstoppable. When O'Brien sees his future self get killed by a beam from a wall panel, he, Sisko, and Odo investigate the panel, and though they don't find anything immediately wrong, Sisko has Odo put a camera on the hallway, just to make sure. Eventually, Odo discovers a surveillance device beamed into the system that presumably had the built-in phaser security system which killed the future O'Brien, but no one makes a big deal out of this; nor does O'Brien find himself drawn back to the panel or forced to replay the future he'd witnessed by some intricate series of coincidences. In other words, in this episode, the future is very much changeable, and no one makes a big deal out of it. This may sound obvious, given the big twist at the end (you couldn't tell this story if it turned out that the future was set in stone), but there's a satisfying impression that the writers trust us to work this out for ourselves.

Then there's the ending, which, thankfully, I saw unspoiled. In order to find out exactly what's going to make the station explode in five hours, O'Brien decides he has to do another time-jump. Now that Bashir understands what's happening to him, they're able to manipulate the process in order to send him to a point in time before his last jump; unfortunately, the process requires O'Brien to undergo another radiation dose, and this one proves too much. Which is a shock. Bashir goes to great pains to warn O'Brien of the dangers of what he's attempting before letting him go through the process, but it's easy to interpret those warnings as just another way to generate suspense, and for much of O'Brien's last jump, that's how it plays out, as his growing weakness slows him and future O'Brien's efforts to get to the bottom of what's going on. But once they realize the truth about the Romulans, our O'Brien realizes he's too ill to make the journey back. So he gives the future O'Brien the time-travel armband, and they swap places—which means, from now on, our O'Brien is actually future O'Brien.

Who was basically our O'Brien anyway, just at a different point in time, although I'm not sure why he was sleeping so comfortably knowing that the station was going to explode, except clearly he didn't know because then—ugh, time travel, it's the worst. Anyway, that's not what's important. What's important is that this is a major shift that doesn't really have any significant impact on the rest of the show (that I know of), but still comes across as unsettling and sad. For the rest of his life, O'Brien's going to feel a little off, like he walked into a movie just a few minutes late. He'll get used to it, probably, and the chief is such a stolid, common-sense presence that I can't imagine he'll let the existential heebie-jeebies keep him down for long. But it's just so odd. "Visionary" doesn't do much dramatic heavy lifting—this is more purely fun than it is deeply felt—but it's twisty and massively entertaining, giving us effective character moments for most of the cast, and ending in a way that seems happy—and is happy—but also kind of isn't. There's nothing quite like reaffirming and undermining the status quo at the same time.

Stray observations:

- It's great how the episode doesn't waste a lot of time on having people try to convince O'Brien that he's seeing things. Initially, everyone assumes he's hallucinating, and then they realize he isn't. Simple as that. (And Quark's reaction to seeing the other O'Brien across the promenade is hilarious.)
- Even the Romulans realize that Odo loves Kira. Eventually, she's going to have to figure it out.
- "I always investigate Quark." Odo, explaining his methods to Sisko.
- There's some great Odo and Sisko stuff throughout the episode; I also liked Odo's little speech on how he gets his information. "Sometimes I have to remind you just how good I am."
- "I hate temporal mechanics." O'Brien & O'Brien

"Distant Voices" (season three, episode 18; originally aired 3/10/1995)

In which Bashir gets a piece of his own mind...

I'm always wary of episodes that work too hard to introduce their theme in the early going. It's not a good sign, because it indicates a certain lack of confidence on the part of the writing staff. Sure, it can work, but all too often you get something like "Distant Voices," in which an overemphasized idea—in this case, Bashir's fear of getting old—is like a great big announcement that, oh hey, Bashir is probably going to have to deal with that particular issues for the next hour or so. It makes the rest of the episode come off as a little too convenient, as though the real lesson we should be taking away from all of this is to never, under any circumstances, confide our greatest worries to anyone, lest we be forced to endure them in a highly metaphorical context. And besides, it's not even necessary. If Bashir had said, "Oh, huh," when Garak had wished him a happy birthday, that would've been enough. Once you get to a certain point in life, it's only natural to be less happy about being reminded you're another year older. Making a big deal out of it just makes Bashir look petulant and spoiled, and in an uninteresting way at that.

To be honest, "Distant Voices" is so middling that I doubt the presence or absence of that opening conversation matters much. There's some creepy imagery here, and clearly the cast is enjoying the chance to play against type, but the story is, if all that talk about aging didn't tip you off, a lot of overemphasized pop psychology that plays out like a lost episode of *Punky Brewster* or some equally literal-minded children's show. Everything we see is happening inside of Bashir's head, which isn't the best place to start from; nothing against the good doctor, but unless the story commits to the full fake out, mental-space storylines tend to be low drama, given that there's really only one character talking to himself in various permutations. It's trippy, sure, and there's some entertainment in wondering what the hell is going to pop up next. And to the writers' credit, the episode never completely settles into a single groove, which could've made this interminable. Still, it's hard not to watch imaginary Kira, Odo, and the others, and suspect the time would've been better spent with the real thing.

Right, so: Bashir is complaining about his birthday, when Quark brings over a Lethean named Altovar who has a proposition for the doctor. He's looking for biomimetic gel to—oh hell, like it matters what he wants it for. It's a controlled substance, Bashir refuses to sell it, so Altovar breaks into the infirmary. Bashir catches him, the Lethean grabs his head and zaps him, and the next thing any of us know, Bashir is waking up, and his temples have gone a bit gray. Oh, and two-thirds of the lights on the station have gone out, and nobody's around.

This is eerie, and while it's not hard to guess that Bashir must be under some kind of spell or trance, the sight of Quark cowering behind his bar while an unseen monster hurls chairs around the room makes for excellent nightmare fuel. When "Distant Voices" focuses on the subconscious imagery, it's not half bad, as the freedom of the setting, and the threat from Altovar (Letheans use a kind of "telepathic attack" on their enemies, and the Altovar in Julian's mind is working to keep him from pulling himself together), are effectively unsettling. Some of the effects, like Odo's "death," don't really work—the changeling melts into a goofy CGI puddle of goo—but the shot of Kira's body, her face frozen in horror, is hard to look away from. And even when the episode isn't scary, it can sometimes mention a charming moment of surreal humor, as when Bashir finally makes it to Ops, and discovers a Dabo girl waiting to serenade him and wish him a very happy birthday. This is before he gets pummeled with tennis balls as he opens various equipment panels. It's very odd.

All this is well and good; I'm not sure the show can really sustain the necessary level of weirdness required to make this work for a full hour, but it's interesting. Where "Distant Voices" really falls apart is when it tries to tie all of this together in a story that has something to do with Julian's fears of death, his self-doubt, and the Lethean's attempt on his life. Thankfully, Bashir figures out what's happening to him comparatively early on, which means there isn't a lot of wandering around saying silly things while the rest of the audience waits for him to open his eyes. (The tip off are the "Distant Voices" of the title; when Bashir finally manages to get a good listen, he realizes he's hearing Dax and Sisko discuss his condition in the waking world.) Once he understands what's happened, Bashir decides it would be fun to figure out what each member of the ensemble is supposed to represent from his own psyche. Dax is his confidence, O'Brien is his self-doubt, Odo is his paranoia, Kira is his belligerence. And so on. This is terribly goofy, and all it really does is give the show an excuse for everyone from the regular cast to appear in what is technically the most bottle-like of bottle episodes. I suppose there's some validity to Bashir's reasoning; different people in our lives often inspire different sides of our personalities. But it doesn't make for especially thrilling television. There's no ambiguity, no drama. Just imaginary people disappearing one by one as an imaginary monster takes them away.

"Distant Voices" tries to get some thrills out of the presence of Garak, who helps Bashir as he ages, mocking him all the way. Garak is a charming, but mysterious, presence in the doctor's life, so it's fitting that he takes on the role of secret villain here. But, again, this isn't actual Garak. This is made-up, fake-Altovar-pretending-to-be-fake Garak. Given that Andrew Robinson isn't in every episode, it's immensely frustrating to see one of his occasional appearances taken up by something like this. Huzzah, Bashir manages to win the day by realizing that his true center of operations is in the infirmary—the place where all of this mess started. There's some satisfaction on seeing him turn the

tables on Altovar, but it's not enough to justify this episode. I'm a Bashir fan, but that doesn't mean I want to watch him talk to himself for an hour.

Stray observations:

- I wonder if Bashir told everyone what special role they played inside his brain? I'm not sure Kira or O'Brien would've taken it well.
- Bashir settles it once and for all: He has feelings for Dax, but he values his friendship with her highly, and would rather not risk it. This makes a lot of sense, and it's nice to see someone be able to be attracted to someone, not sleep with them, and have that not be the end of the world.
- Fake Altovar (I assume he's fake, unless the real Altovar has found a way to project himself into Julian's head) tells the doctor that he could've hooked up with Dax if he'd tried harder. I'm not sure if this is a retcon or just delusional thinking, but I suspect that if Bashir had pursued Dax any further, she'd probably have tossed him out an airlock.

Next week: We take another trip "Through The Looking Glass," and get a proper Garak episode with "Improbable Cause."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Through The Looking Glass”/“Improbable Cause”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[11/08/12 10:00AM](#)

“Through The Looking Glass” (season 3, episode 19; originally aired 4/17/1995)

In which Sisko is the best imitation of himself...

Sisko’s wife is dead. He’s mentioned this a few times, but it’s a difficult bit of backstory to keep bringing up. The death is a few years old, so the initial wounds have healed; and since Sisko rarely dates (at least, not that we see), there’s no reason to deal with the lingering pain of a lost spouse. We don’t know anything about Jennifer Sisko. She appeared in the pilot, but even then, she didn’t make much of an impression. Nice woman, pretty, seemed fond of Benjamin, and now dead. Widowing your leading man (or woman) is an easy way to add a taste of tragedy without drowning out the other flavors. But it’s the sort of thing which is best left in the past. There’s no question that losing a spouse is an awful, life-changing event, but if Commander Sisko spent every other episode moping around Quark’s and telling the same three or four anecdotes about a woman we don’t care about, it would get old fast.

Thankfully, “Through The Looking Glass” isn’t really about Ben and Jennifer, although that’s the ostensible premise. A strangely dressed O’Brien shows up in Ops and kidnaps Sisko; a couple scenes later, we’re in the Mirror Universe. The strangely dressed O’Brien is actually Miles from the other side, and he needs our Sisko’s help. It turns out that the Mirror Sisko is (presumed) dead, having been blown up on his own ship during a fight with some Romulans. This wouldn’t be a huge problem, but Mirror Sisko’s wife, Mirror Jennifer, is working on a project which will allow the Alliance (who are the baddies) to track down all of the Resistance’s hidden bases, and Mirror O’Brien wants our Sisko to

persuade Mirror Jennifer to set aside the project. Which raises all sorts of troubling issues for Sisko, not the least of which is that Mirror Jennifer and Mirror Sisko weren't exactly on speaking terms. But because Mirror O'Brien refuses to send him home otherwise, and because Sisko really does want to see Jennifer one last time, whatever version she might be, he agrees to go along with the plan. Wackiness, as one would expect, ensues.

This is only the [second Mirror Universe episode](#) DS9 has given us (and just the third in the whole history of *Star Trek*), but the concept is already wearing a bit thin around the edges. "Through The Looking Glass" doesn't ever drag, and it's fun watching Mirror Kira do her hyped-up-sexy-evil thing, but the episode never really manages to shake the nagging suspicion that there's no point to any of this. The first (and arguably best) purpose of an alternate-reality storyline is to show familiar actors and concepts in a different light. On the regular show, Kira is passionate and deeply moral; in the mirror world, she's venal, sadistic, and perverse. This is fun because it lets Nana Visitor show off different skills (this is not intended to be a creepy comment), and because it suggests what might have happened if our Kira had taken a series of increasingly wrong turns in her life. Mirror Kira is creepy because she's entirely self-focused—she doesn't seem to have a value system beyond, "If it keeps me alive, and also if it feels good." It's like all of our Kira's good intentions rotted out from the inside.

This sort of logic extends to the rest of the Mirror Universe design. Seeing DS9 as a vile place where slaves are forced to work until they die is a reminder of what the station was like during the Cardassian occupation, as well as a warning of a possible future. Other characters serve as shadowy twists on their normal selves—and, okay, I don't really need to get explicit about the premise here, since we've already been through one of these. Which is actually my problem, because after that initial coolness wears off, there really isn't a lot to recommend the Mirror Universe. The charm of it is in the novelty, of that sudden shock of seeing good guys be evil and evil guys get martyred, of seeing a place where the *Trek* vision of a Utopian future never quite made it off the drawing board. It's hard to imagine anything good lasting for long in the Mirror Universe, so it's hard to root for anyone, or get all that invested in what happens next.

This isn't a premise that can really sustain serious long-term development. It's hard to root for anyone, partly because it doesn't seem like they can win, and partly because just about everybody in the Mirror Universe is an asshole. Mirror O'Brien fares the best (I like this; it implies that Miles' essential O'Brien-ness is consistent regardless of the reality), but given the general tenor and scarcity of these storylines, even he fails to register much. Yeah, it's funny to see Bashir as a pushy asshole, and it's funny to see a sexually aggressive Dax with a different haircut, but it's impossible to escape the impression that this whole concept is a one-note joke trying to achieve depth, and not quite making it. In its way, it's as frustrating as last week's [only-in-Bashir's-mind episode](#), as once again we have one regular character isolated in a world familiar to strangers. There's more of a sense of consequence here, since these people exist outside of Sisko's head, but it's still perilously close to filler. Now that the novelty is gone, the Mirror Universe has to stand on its own, and there really isn't much holding it up.

It doesn't help that Sisko and Jennifer's conversations aren't revelatory. I wasn't a fan of Felecia M. Bell in ["Emissary"](#) and while she's given more to do in this episode, her low-key approach still fails to make much of an impression. Admittedly, unlike the rest of the cast, she doesn't get to riff on a well-established character; Mirror Jennifer isn't all that different from what we saw of our Jennifer. But even cutting her some slack, her work doesn't generate the kind of sparks necessary to make "Through The Looking Glass" worth the time. Bringing back Sisko's dead wife is probably the last card the writers can play with the Mirror Universe. It's this or bring back Bareil, and in many ways, that would create the same problems: dull actor, sketched-in relationship, no place to go beyond the initial shock of meeting. Mirror Jennifer isn't Sisko's Jennifer, after all, and while he's happy to see her, and the two seem to get on well (better than Mirror Jennifer got on with her actual husband, even), no one suggests bringing her back to his world, or him sticking around on the other side. Which means there's no real crisis at the core of the story, and no significant suspense. Apart from the death of poor Mirror Rom, there are no shocks. Sisko and O'Brien come up with a plan, Sisko manages to persuade Mirror Jennifer to side with the rebels, Sisko uses his knowledge of the station against Mirror Kira, and Sisko and Mirror Jennifer have a brief conversation in which she makes it obvious that she knows he isn't her real husband. Bittersweet, sure, but bland, like a reheated leftover in need of more salt. Maybe our next trip to the other side will have more to recommend it, but for now, the Mirror Universe is a pit stop on the way to something that matters.

Stray observations:

- Oh, and Mirror Dax and Sisko slept together. I can't decide if the writers are trying to push the real Dax and Sisko together, or if they're just messing with fans' minds. Either way, I appreciate the lack of hand-wringing about it. It's Sisko's job to pretend he's Mirror Sisko; Mirror Sisko and Mirror Dax are having sex; ergo, Sisko needs to have sex with Mirror Dax to keep his cover. Admittedly, Mirror Dax has little if any bearing on the rest of the episode, and her appearance is played more as a joke (how do symbiotes work in the Mirror Universe, anyway?) than anything else. But it's legitimately, if mildly, surprising, which is something.

"Improbable Cause" (season 3, episode 20; originally aired 4/24/1995)

In which Garak gets an offer he can't refuse...

What makes Garak great? His insincerity is so intense that it somehow turns back around on itself, becoming honest. He's almost always lying, his smile says, but since he knows he's lying, and you know he's lying, isn't that a sort of truth? It would've been easy for Garak to turn into a cipher, a mysterious figure who existed solely to deliver an increasingly elaborate series of shocking twists, but that isn't the case at all. There is a core to the ex-spy which, while difficult to pin down, is undeniably there. Part of this is the writing, and part of this is Andrew Robinson's performance; it's possible to see the precursor to *Lost's* Benjamin Linus in Robinson's work. But where Ben was a great villain on a show that didn't shy away from good and evil, Garak walks a thin line in a franchise which, to the best of my

knowledge, has never had a recurring character so relentlessly ambiguous. Maybe Q from [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#)—but while Q’s methods weren’t always obvious, his motives (to screw with Picard, to entertain himself, and to maybe teach everyone a lesson) were. But at this point in *DS9*’s run, I really don’t know of what Garak is capable. I don’t know how far he’d go, and who he’d betray if he felt it was necessary. Yet at the same time, there’s enough to his at the core that these questions remain important, and compelling. Garak has just enough of a soul to make me hope he never sells it—and he’s just untrustworthy enough to make me believe that’s still a risk.

The reason this is important is made evident in an episode like “Improbable Cause,” the beginning of a two-part storyline which brings our favorite tailor back into the limelight. This time out, there are no alternate realities or telepathically induced comas, and the focus is on a seemingly mundane assassination attempt—no high concept sci-fi hooks to distract us, just Garak, a blown-up shop, and a mysterious killer. That’s a good enough premise regardless of the focus, but by placing Garak in the center of everything, the hour gives itself an extra, exciting edge. After all, we know so little about the Cardassian’s past that the attempt on his life could’ve come from anyone, and for a wide variety of reasons. It might even turn out that he deserved it; that some horrible bit of treachery he committed while serving in the Obsidian Order has finally come back to bite him on the ass. Or it could just be that he set the bomb off himself, for reasons of his own.

SPOILER ALERT: It was the last thing. Garak exploded his own shop, because he saw a Flaxian assassin lurking around the station, realized he was probably being targeted, and decided to force the issue. This is, you’ll pardon me for saying, classic Garak, a duplicity so straightforward it’s practically routine. The truth comes out about halfway through the episode, and the best part is, it doesn’t really matter. On another show, the reveal that the supposed victim was actually behind the attack would be a third act twist; here, it’s a stratagem to maintain control and smoke out the real culprits, as well as ensure the sympathy and assistance of outside parties.

That’s telling, by the way. Instead of seeing the Flaxian and reporting him to Odo, Garak uses a lie to help find the truth. This is how he thinks: The simplest approach to any problem is the one which requires the most lies. He’s probably even right. While Odo is undoubtedly driven to maintain order and justice on the station, any report from Garak would’ve been met with suspicion, if not outright disbelief. By framing his potential killer, Garak ensures that he’s given at least some benefit of the doubt.

Besides, by the time Odo does catch on to what happened, the Flaxian is dead, and it’s become obvious that something is going on. (Odo’s deduction, based on the fact that the Flaxian assassin used gas to kill his targets, and therefore wouldn’t have changed his habits while targeting Garak, is very Odo-like, methodical and based entirely on his observation of behavior.) Which means there isn’t much point in arresting Garak. A number of other former members of the Obsidian Order have been dying off recently, which, while suspicious, can’t be considered all that unusual. After all, the Order is a powerful group of paranoid, brilliant government operatives, and while there’s no doubt that Cardassians are innately talented at the sort of game-playing such work requires, you’d still expect to

see a high casualty rate among the retirees. (It's actually somewhat surprising that these people are allowed to retire in the first place.) No, where things get really interesting is the fact that the Flaxian is connected to the Romulans. They're the ones that destroy his ship (and him inside it) when he attempts to leave the station, and they're also the ones that most likely hired him in the first place.

So something is clearly going on, and it's up to Odo and Garak to find out what. Once they know that old Obsidian members have been taken out, Garak decides that his old boss, that loveable nut Enabran Tain, is next for the chop. Odo heads out to investigate, and Garak, much to Odo's chagrin, tags along. It's an excellent pairing, and one we haven't seen much of before. Garak's intricate, constantly shifting conversational approach (he plays lies like Glenn Gould played the piano) bounces right off Odo. The changeling is dogged, smart, and relentlessly straightforward, and it isn't really possible to charm him or put him off with empty wit. The two only really get one big scene together, flying a shuttlecraft to a mysterious planet where they think Enabran may be hiding, but it's excellent. Slowly, patiently, Odo forces Garak to admit that his concern over Tain's life isn't merely academic; Tain was his mentor, and Garak really does care what happens to him, despite the miserable conclusion of their professional relationship. What's fascinating is that this is far from the darkest secret a person could hide. Garak being fond of his old boss is nothing to be all that ashamed about, and yet the fact that it makes him vulnerable makes Odo's ability to winnow out the truth all the more impressive. All Garak can do in response is point out Odo's perpetual outsider status, and his clear lack of emotional connections—an accusation which, judging from what we know about Odo's feelings for Kira, is bullshit.

That's another reason Garak is great: he isn't always right. It's easy to make this kind of character infallible. A large portion of his strength and his charm comes from the way he stands slightly apart from everyone, always knowing which way the wind is blowing, and just where to stand if he wants to avoid it. (While the two have very different personalities, Odo and Garak share this quality—and I wonder if Garak's conversational assault on him in the shuttle isn't at least partly driven by Garak's jealousy that there's someone out there who's even more perfect an observer than himself.) The temptation, then, is to make him always two or three steps ahead of the game, because if his brilliance is punctured too many times, he turns into a joke, an over-confident buffoon whose only advantage is that he's too stupid to recognize his failings. Obviously Garak isn't that, but he's also not so idealized as to be personality-less. Instead, he's distinct, clearly mortal, the mere fact of his presence on DS9 a constant reminder that something in him prevented him from being the true Cardassian sociopath he once aspired to be.

Which is especially important in "Improbable Cause" when you consider how the episode ends. Garak and Odo find Tain—or, to put it more accurately, he finds them. It turns out Tain is responsible for the deaths of those other Obsidians, and he was also the one who had the Romulans send the Flaxian after Garak. The former head of the Order has decided to come out of retirement, permanently, and to do that, he needed to make sure that there weren't any former associates with embarrassing secrets hanging around. He has big plans. There's a reason we've heard rumblings of the Order and the Romulans recently. The two groups have teamed up to make a major assault on the Dominion,

taking the fight directly to the Founders. In their effort to solve the mystery, Garak and Odo have stumbled upon the flagship of the new Obsidian Order/Romulan coalition. They're headed straight through the wormhole, and now that he's seeing Garak face-to-face, Tain has decided to be reasonable. He offers Garak a position by his side in the new government, and Garak accepts.

This is what all of Garak's excellence comes down to. With a lesser character, it would be easy to predict what happens next. If Garak was more of an obvious hero, his acceptance of Tain's offer would simply be a contrivance in order to protect himself and Odo until he could figure out a way for both of them to escape. If Garak was more of an obvious villain, then this would be the final reveal of his true colors, and Odo would be on his own. Odo is, after all, a changeling, and Tain is going to have some very definite (and presumably unpleasant) uses for him in the immediate future. But there's no way to know how much Garak means of what he says. He's obviously happy to be working with his old master once more, but is there a tinge of forced satisfaction in his voice? Impossible to say. Garak is a hero *and* a villain, and he just got handed what he wanted most in all the world. There's no telling what he'll do next, and that's exactly as it should be.

Stray observations:

- Another reference to Odo's "connections." There's a scene where he talks to a Cardassian informant in a cave system which is kind of like getting a glimpse of Odo's crime-show spin-off. He may not be the most sociable creature in existence, but he knows his work.
- Garak's moral from "The Boy Who Cried Wolf": "That you should never tell the same lie twice."
- "Well, the truth is usually just an excuse for a lack of imagination." —Garak again, obviously. (What I love about one-liners like this is the baldness of Garak's deceptions. He hides by being completely and utterly open about lying constantly.)
- It's also possible that Garak's speech about Odo having no friends or loved ones was a way to subtly needle him about Kira. Riddles wrapped in enigmas, etc.

Next week: Garak and Odo face off in "The Die Is Cast," and Sisko and Jake spend some quality time as "Explorers."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Die is Cast”/“Explorers”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[11/15/12 10:00AM](#)

“The Die Is Cast” (season three, episode 21; originally aired 5/1/1995)

In which you do not fuck with the Founders...

There’s a machine that can stop Odo from changing shape. That’s the part I keep coming back to. It’s far from the most important revelation in “The Die Is Cast,” but something about it sticks in my mind. Maybe it’s because of how much this whole two-episode arc (as well as the various hints about the Cardassian and Romulan build-up which we’ve been getting all season) is about rigidity; about how much we work to establish an image of ourselves, and once we’ve decided we’ve found the right one, how hard we work to freeze it in place, as though permanence could be made eternal by a simple act of will. Tain’s attempts to return to his former prominence, to destroy the Founders in one fell swoop and end the Dominion threat, speaks of his arrogance, his misguided confidence in himself, and his unwillingness to adapt to the potentialities of new threats. He’s trying to regain his former status, and position himself as the new leader of the Cardassian empire, and to do that requires a certain kind of inflexible thinking. It means ignoring how long he’s been in retirement, how much the universe has changed in his absence. It means believing the Founders are no different than any other enemy, and therefore can be dealt with accordingly. It means, in effect, finding a point and holding to it—in effect, doing willingly what Odo is forced into. The resultant effect is eerily similar.

Then there's Garak, trapped between what he used to be and what he couldn't help becoming. Odo suffers more physical agony, but if this episode has a heart, it belongs to the tailor, as his initial enthusiasm for taking part in Tain's grand plans slowly begins to fade. It's easy at first, of course. For the first time in many years, Elim and Enabran are spending time together without immediately wanting each other dead. They share a drink (Romulan, and, as such, sub-standard), and cheerfully discuss the destruction ahead. Garak indulges in some revenge fantasies about all the enemies he's going to eliminate once he gets back to Cardassia, and he and Tain laugh about old times. Then Tain starts in on the real work: he needs Garak to interrogate Odo. Because Odo is a Founder, and even if he claims he doesn't know any of their plans, surely he must have some useful piece of information he can provide the cause. You get the impression that Tain doesn't really care one or the other. He is, after all, the mind behind the Obsidian Order. If there was any relevant data to the cause at hand, surely he would have ferreted it out on his own. No, I'd bet the real reason Tain makes his request is to find out how far his old student is willing to go to prove his loyalty.

Pretty far, it turns out. "The Die Is Cast" is an excellent episode across the board, and one of the reasons it works so well is that it doesn't compromise Garak's character in order to make him more palatable. He is a gifted interrogator, and while the script makes it a point to describe his efforts as primarily psychological (Tain tells a story about Garak forcing a confession by simply staring at a prisoner for hours without speaking), there's no question that he's not above getting physical if need be. Or at least, that's how he was in the old days. When Tain raises the issue, Garak willingly agrees to question Odo, and their first conversation has all the hallmarks of a villain trying to earn a hero's confidence. Odo isn't too worried; after all, he has no real fear of physical danger, and he uses the exchange mostly as a chance to mock Garak's new allegiances. No one goes too far, and, apart from the shift in power dynamic, it's a scene which probably could've taken place before the capture without too many changes. Basically, this is all within safe bounds, which is probably why Garak isn't overly uncomfortable. His sleeves are still down, and his hands are still clean.

Then Tain introduces the device which will prevent Odo from changing his form, and things get mean. Last week, we talked about how much of the power of Garak's character lies in his fundamental ambiguity. Even though there's an undeniable core to him, which means that his choices still have stakes, and that we care if he goes too far, there's no comfortable reassurance that he'll make the right choices, or that he'll hold back when offered, say, a return to the prominence and power he once enjoyed. Just watch the look on Andrew Robinson's face (and it always amazes me how much actors are able to convey through all those prosthetics) as Tain tells him there's a way to truly hurt Odo. He's clearly horrified at the idea, but even more tellingly, he's horrified *that he's horrified*. For most of his time on the show, Garak has talked a good game, and played the role of someone who choose to appear harmless, but probably isn't; someone who, yes, is a nice guy right now, but that could change at any moment. Apart from his friendship with Bashir, Garak never really commits to anything. Even his tailor shop is expendable. But the drawback of getting what you most want is that you have to start making choices. You actually have to be someone, as opposed to collection of pleasant anecdotes and

vaguely threatening innuendo. And now that the big moment has finally arrived, it turns out he might be the man (well, the Cardassian) he thought he was.

Again, to the episode's credit, it doesn't shy away from the consequences. Garak tries a few lame attempts to avoid it, but in the end, he has to go back to Odo's room, and use the device to torture the constable. And it's horrifying. The makeup effects of Odo stuck in his human form are some of the most effective I've seen on the show; he's pathetic and ghoulish, somehow, like he died in the middle of the conversation, but is so determined to make his point that he'll keep talking until his jaw rots off. The camera stays focused on René Auberjonois for most of the scene, and he does remarkable work.

[Star Trek: The Next Generation](#) took most of an episode to demonstrate the full effect of physical and psychological torture. *DS9* does it in basically one scene, and while the result isn't as quite as harrowing, it's very, very effective. And of course, Odo does eventually break. Despite the constable's repeated assurances that he knows nothing, Garak is convinced that Odo must have some secret in him, some piece of information he couldn't bare to part with, and it turns out the tailor is right. Odo does have a secret: He wants to go home to his people. It's a deeply personal revelation that Odo must've wanted to protect at all costs, and telling it must have hurt him. And it's useless. It doesn't change Tain's mission, and it doesn't provide any tactical advantage against the Founders. It just means that Garak wins for absolutely nothing.

Leave him there for a second, face in his hands while Odo, finally given back his freedom, pours himself into a bucket. Sisko and the others keep themselves busy this episode, and while his decision to disobey orders and take the *Defiant* after Odo (and Garak) isn't as exciting as the main story, it's never a drag on the episode, and it does introduce some ideas which I'm betting will be important down the line. Namely that Commander Eddington, who's done basically nothing since he was first introduced, is more a stickler for rules than anyone else in command on *DS9*, and his commitment to Starfleet leads him to sabotage the *Defiant* after the ship leaves the station. Eddington isn't a big enough character for this to be a huge betrayal, and his presence in the first part of the episode (after being seemingly forgotten for so long) suggests he's up to some kind of craziness, but it's interesting that Sisko allows him to remain on the bridge after he confesses his actions. It shows the kind of strange gray area the show lives in now. Eddington may not have the right kind of loyalty, but they are all fighting on the same side.

Odo makes a similar decision when he ultimately forgives Garak's actions. Well, forgives may be going too far, but they don't end the episode as enemies.

Of course, before we get to that, we should probably look at the big ticket moment in "The Die Is Cast," the twist which gives the hour its title (at least in the most obvious sense). The Cardassian and Romulan fleet arrives at the Founders' home world. They read life signs on the planet below, and Tain, after savoring the moment for a second or so, gives the order to fire. The ships bombard the planet, destroying 30 percent of its crust, and—the life signs don't change. It's a trap. The Founders knew Tain was coming, and least than a minute after he realizes it, Jem'Hadar ships are popping into view—150 of them, to be exact. They make quick work of the Cardassian and Romulan fleet, which was, it turns

out, the whole point of this trip. Tain thought he was in control, but as he realizes in the end (and his manic, despairing monologue as he desperately tries to figure out how it all went wrong, is yet another bit of awesome), the whole thing was designed by the Founders to wipe out the Cardassian and Romulan threat in one fell swoop. They had an inside man, it turns out: Lovok, the head of the Romulan forces, is a changeling. He makes a point of saying goodbye to Odo, and, given what we've learned about Odo's true wishes, and what we've just seen of the Founder's strategic genius, it's amazing that Odo decides to go back to the station with Garak.

This is all great stuff, thrilling and shocking, and, best of all, it has an impact which is going to affect how the show goes forward in ways I can't predict. The end has the status quo restored, give or take a few thousand Cardassians and Romulans, but it's still momentous; bad guys pulling reversals is nothing new, but this takes a background plot and casually, brutally upends it. It's the kind of bold storytelling which makes for great drama. But as excited as I am to watch this play out, my favorite scene of the episode is the last one. Garak is sifting through the wreckage of his shop, and Odo pays him a visit. Throughout their entire conversation, Odo can only be seen in shadowy reflection, because he's the one with the power now. Garak's brief return to the old ways is over, blown to bits only hours after it began, but the truth is, it was over long before then. That's why Odo invites him to breakfast, and why Garak, lost, stunned, and maybe hopeful, agrees. They both know each other's secrets now; they both want to go home, but they can't. There is something which stops them from changing into who they want to be. It's called a soul.

Stray observations:

- I don't know if Tain is gone for good or not, but if he is, that was one hell of an exit.
- Leland Orser, one of the great "That Guy"s, plays Lovok. And no, I definitely did not see that twist coming.
- "Oh, no, you're going to torture me, aren't you. How I've been dreading this. Please, have mercy, Garak." —Odo, master of sarcasm.
- "I'm afraid the fault, dear Tain, is not in the stars but in ourselves." —Garak, throwing some Shakespeare at his former mentor, and paying off the cold open of "Improbable Cause."
- Admiral Toddman tells Sisko that the massacre of the Romulan and Cardassian ships was a bit like The Battle of Wolf 359, a.k.a. The One Where The Borg Killed Nearly Everyone. That's not good.
- "Do you know what the sad part is, Odo? I'm a very good tailor." —Garak

"Explorers" (season three, episode 22; originally aired 5/8/1995)

In which you can get there from here...

I have to apologize; this review is going to be shorter than it ought to be, as I spent too much time talking about the previous episode (which, to be fair, deserved the space), and now I fear I've used up my word quota. I say this because even though "Explorers" is a much quieter, and much less

ambitious, hour of television than “The Die Is Cast,” it’s still quite good. I can’t help wondering if fans of the show gave this similar short shrift when it originally aired. Not because they were wrong (or shared my poor time-management skills), but because nothing of any real significance happens here. Bashir runs into a former rival from medical school, and realizes that he was getting worked up over nothing, and Jake and Sisko fly an ancient Bajoran ship to Cardassian space in order to prove a point. The events in the Gamma Quadrant aren’t mentioned, and don’t seem to have any affect on the proceedings. Sure, there’s some minor tension between Sisko and Gul Dukat, but there’s always minor tension between those two, and everything ends in (the non-lethal kind of) fireworks. If “The Die Is Cast” was a bold statement about how far the writers are willing to go with their main storyline, “Explorers” is a low-key reassurance that there’s still time for small, intimate character studies.

But it still feels different somehow—probably because we have a greater sense of just how important the small, intimate moments really are. Plus, it’s been a while since the show gave Sisko some personal time, and while I wouldn’t think “immediately following a massive military maneuver out your back door” would be ideal vacation season, he probably needs all the relaxation he can get. It’s fun to learn a bit more about the commander; his character is clearly defined, but his interests aren’t as clear, for obvious reasons (we follow the majority of the characters on this show because of their day jobs; which doesn’t mean the show doesn’t have room for personal stuff, just it tends to be secondary). The idea that Sisko is so entranced by the history of Bajoran space travel that he’s willing to recreate an ancient Bajoran ship is a charming one. It’s a kind of geeky dad move that just happens to require significant resources, and end in a four day trip through the universe, and his excitement about the project, contrasted against the way almost no one else on the station understands the point of it, is cool. We’ve seen Sisko the badass before, and I’m sure we’ll see him again (he has, after all, finally grown that goatee you folks keep talking about), but I also like getting to know Sisko the dorky enthusiast.

Plus, this leads to spending time with Jake, and the writers and actors on the show have always done a great job nailing the father/son dynamic. Jake’s been less of a presence on the series this season than he has in the past (at least, I think he has), but while he’s done the standard surly, and frustrated, teenager shtick before, it’s never become completely unbearable, and there’s always been a clear sense of the bond between him and Sisko. This episode is no exception. He initially passes on the trip (and I love how no one seems at all concerned about Sisko going off for a few days into deep space; it’s a sign of just how normal space travel has become in the future), but when he gets accepted into a writing school in New Zealand, he comes along for a chance to take over his ambitions with his dad. It all goes down fairly easily, and while there isn’t any real intense drama in the episode (Sisko’s ship has a few problems, and at one point even seems to have broken down completely with no way to call home for rescue, but it never feels all that urgent), it never gets boring. I especially liked Sisko’s reaction to Jake’s short story—the “shows promise” is something I’ve heard before myself, from my own dad, and I reacted to it about the same way Jake does.

Back on the station, Bashir panics when he learns an old rival is dropping in, and, well, you can probably guess how this plays out. As much as I like the doctor, this whole storyline feels like

something that belongs on a kid's cartoon; the reveal that the rival actually wishes she'd gotten Bashir's assignment on DS9 wraps things up a little too neatly, as though the whole thing were arranged just to teach Julian the value of appreciating what you have. It's not incredibly tedious, but it does tip over into the kind of too-sweet easiness that Jake and Sisko's story mostly manages to avoid. Curiously, this seems to happen often with Bashir storylines that don't hinge on matters of life and death.

Regardless, it's not so bad as to ruin the rest of the episode, which, again, is good—although honestly, I'm not sure there's really that much to say about it. Jake is worried his dad isn't dating (does this ever come up again? No, don't tell me, I'll find out), Sisko is surprised about the New Zealand school offer, but then immediately urges Jake to take it. The usual back and forth between people who love each other but aren't quite sure what happens next follows; Jake is getting ready to go out on his own, and Sisko recognizes that, and supports him, while at the same time feeling a loss. And then, at the end, when it seems all hope is lost, the Cardassians show up to tell them they've accomplished their goal, and all is well. Which, come to think, is basically the lesson of Bashir's story: things are rarely as bad as you think. "The Die Is Cast" had roughly the exact opposite lesson, so maybe that's the point of placing "Explorers" where it is. You need to have hope if you're going to have fear, after all.

Stray observations:

- You know, for someone with no romantic interest in him, Dax really enjoys cockblocking Bashir. (It's legitimately hilarious.)
- Any episode with a drunken O'Brien and Bashir scene is fine by me.

In two weeks: Quark and Rom return home to deal with some "Family Matters," and Kira sees an old friend in "Shakaar."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Family Business”/“Shakaar”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[11/29/12 10:00AM](#)

“Family Business” (season 3, episode 23; originally aired 5/15/1992)

In which you can go home again, but it'll cost you...

This week, Quark and Rom return to Ferenginar to deal with their rebellious mother, and Jake tries to get his father laid. Good to see the show getting back to its high-stakes intensity so quickly.

Ha ha, I kid because I'm awful. While “Family Business” has nothing to do with the Dominion or the Founders, it's a well-built, surprisingly heartfelt episode about the stresses of family, cultural bigotry, and the glories of baseball. Both this and “Shakaar” are the kinds of episodes that *Deep Space Nine* has been doing since the beginning (more or less), but both demonstrate the confidence of the show's creative team and cast when it comes to the stories they want to tell, and the art with which they tell them. The tone in particular strikes me as particularly appropriate to the *Star Trek* franchise, a sort of complex, honest, ultimately optimistic view of the power of communication. Not everyone gets what they want in these hours, but there is a sense of progress, however limited, an impression that it really is possible for people (human or otherwise) to sit down and come to some sort of terms. Whether or not that's true in the real world, there's enough fairness here to make it *feel* true; I want to believe, as the saying goes, and maybe that's enough.

The most notable element of “Family Business” is that it’s a Ferengi-centric episode that isn’t played for laughs. Oh, there are jokes, and not all of them work: Quark and Rom’s repeated insistence that their mother get naked (Ferengi women aren’t allowed to wear clothes) starts off as sort of “ha ha” silly, but gets weirder and less funny with each repetition. But the main plot itself is played very straight, in a way that never becomes strident or shrill. *Trek* has done social-commentary episodes before, and the danger is always that the attempt to deal with controversial issues in a metaphorical context is a hard balance to strike. Push too hard, and you get lectures and scenarios which can’t stand on their own; chicken out, and the metaphor loses its teeth. *DS9* has managed to handle weighty stuff in the past, largely because its commitment is first and foremost to the integrity of its fictional universe—the metaphor gives weight to the drama without distracting from it.

That’s largely the case here. The premise is that Quark is in legal trouble because his mother, Ishka (an unexpected and terrific Andrea Martin), is accused with earning profit. Ferengi women aren’t allowed to earn profit. They aren’t allowed to do a lot of things it turns out, and the main conflict of the episode is Quark’s attempts to persuade his mother to behave more “appropriately.” Obviously the institutionalized bigotry on Ferenginar—where females are legally prevented from running their own businesses (or investing in the businesses of others), traveling, or even speaking with strangers—is a satire of real-world cultures which operate on the same horrible dogma. The Ferengi take it further than most, but not so much further that the situation becomes detached from any significance outside itself. But while that’s the jumping-off point for the story, and while I have my suspicions that the series will be coming back to this problem down the line (and keeping roughly half your species in bondage is a pretty big problem), this hour isn’t about destroying the patriarchy or fomenting rebellion. Its scope is limited to the effects of Ferengi culture on one family, and by keeping a big issue on a small level, the writers make things personal, and avoid the pitfalls of stridency.

This is helped by the fact that, as fundamentally off-putting as the Ferengi government is, the threat against Ishka isn’t presented as all that threatening. When Quark receives notice about his mother’s crimes (Brunt, an official of the Ferengi Commerce Authority played by Jeffrey Combs, arrives on *DS9* and closes down Quark’s bar), the conflict is simple: Either Quark gets his mother to confess what she’s done, or else she’ll be put into indentured slavery, and Quark himself will have to pay restitution for her transactions. Slavery is no joke, but Ishka, who refuses to confess on the grounds that she doesn’t believe she did anything wrong, doesn’t appear overly concerned by the possibility. The script follows her lead, as most of the dramatic tension is centered on Quark’s growing horror at her obstinacy. It’s not played for laughs, exactly, but while it’s clear that we should be disturbed and unsettled by the Ferengi’s awful treatment of their females, Ishka doesn’t behave like someone who is afraid for her life. This is a choice which could be seen as undercutting the episode’s more satirical points, but it serves “Family Business” overall by allowing for our focus to stay primarily on the interactions between Quark, Rom, and their Moogie.

Those interactions really are terrific. Martin’s performance fits Ishka right into the back-and-forth between Quark and his brother. Rom gets another chance to show his worth in a time of crisis; he still isn’t the sharpest businessman around, but he loves his mom, and he loves his brother, and he won’t

risk letting them destroy the family. The episode's strangest scene has Rom and Ishka speaking privately in Ishka's bedroom. The way Rom keeps averting his eyes from his clothes-wearing Moogie is goofy enough, but her decision to disrobe, then his decision to lay his head on her naked lap, then her decision to sharpen his teeth for him, which he is very happy about—I dunno. I understand the intention, but there's something distracting about watching a son beg his mother to disrobe that even a basic understanding of (imagined) cultural differences can't get past. The fact that the writers proceed to rub our faces in the awkwardness is either a drastic piece of misjudgement, or a wicked bit of audience nose-tweaking, I'm not sure which.

There's also a subplot about Sisko's gradually developing involvement with Kasidy Yates (Penny Johnson, who I'll always remember as the first character I really loathed on 24—though she's a fine actress), the freighter captain Jake mentioned in "Explorers." It's a cute story, and it's nice to see Sisko getting back in the game, so to speak. He and Yates have good chemistry together (Johnson always comes off as tough, and that seems like a solid match for Sisko), and the scene where Benjamin learns that Kasidy's brother plays baseball is cute and fun. It really is impressive at how good *DS9* is at doing this kind of low-key, personable storytelling. It helps the characters and the setting achieve a lived-in feel, which in turn means that when the stakes get high, we're invested in what comes next.

Still, the main focus of the hour is the battle between Quark and Ishka, and it's impressive how fair the writers are to both characters. The main sympathies should be with Ishka: she's oppressed, she's only trying to do stand up for herself, and, as it turns out, she's absolutely fantastic at earning profit. In fact, Brunt's initial accusation only covers the smallest fraction of her actual dealings, a fact Quark quickly discovers when he starts looking in to her affairs. But Quark, who opposes every change his mother is fighting for, isn't portrayed as a monster. Partly that's because we've already spent enough time with him to know he's basically a decent sort—greedy (but then, that's his culture), willing to lie if it will benefit him, but not outright evil, and even, in his own small way, heroic. (We're going to ignore the whole "sexual harassment of a Dabo girl" accusation for now.) But mostly it's that the episode treats his problems as coming from an understandable place, even if his objections are wrongheaded. Of course Ishka should be allowed to earn; of course the restrictions on her freedom are ridiculous and evil and should be fought against. But the idea of a son struggling to live his own life, while being unable to understand why his mother would want the same for herself, isn't that difficult to relate to. Odds are, most of us have had times when our parents or siblings have behaved in ways we couldn't understand, and which drove us crazy, although hopefully not in a situation as dire as this one.

It all ends happily enough. On Rom's insistence, Ishka and Quark resolve their differences; Ishka admits that she's more like Quark than she sometimes likes to let on, and Quark allows that his father was probably not the best businessman in the world. This doesn't really change the fundamental disagreements between them, but it re-establishes enough common ground to allow Ishka to finally give in to Quark's demands without losing her dignity. She also only gives up about a third of her profit, which is character consistent, and also helps ensure the idea that the Ferengi way of life, at least with regard to the females, is going to change. It might not happen today or even tomorrow, but it'll happen, and ladies like Ishka are going to make sure it costs someone every step of the way.

Stray observations:

- Speaking of cost, I liked the Kafkaesque orientation of the Ferengi Commerce Authority; everything comes with a price.
- Dax is weirdly invested in getting Sisko laid. On Yates: “Let me put it this way: If I were Curzon, I would’ve stolen her from you by now.” Sounds like someone’s sublimating!
- Rom really is great in this. It’s fun to watch the writers figure out his strengths.

“Shakaar” (season 3, episode 24; originally aired 5/22/1995)

In which you can go home again, provided you’re willing to throw a few punches...

It’s been a while since we’ve had a good Kira episode, hasn’t it? Probably either [“Defiant”](#) or [“Second Skin,”](#) which is over half a season ago. After being one of the show’s most dominant characters, the major has stepped back into the ensemble; it’s not so much that she’s less important than she was, as it is that everyone else has gotten comparatively more important, and the series doesn’t need to rely on the former Barjoran terrorist to do as much of the dramatic heavy lifting. Still, it’s good to see her front and center again, in an hour which in some ways feels like a throwback to the first two seasons. This isn’t meant as a criticism. “Shakaar” isn’t awkward or forced in the way some of the series’ earlier episodes could be, but it does focus its attentions on Kira and her place in Bajoran politics, specifically the relationship between the provisional government and the freedom fighters who helped to ensure that government’s existence.

Hey, remember Kai Winn? Of course you do. Funny story: The head of the provisional government has died of a heart attack, and Kai Winn is the only one running to take over his place. This would make her the de facto leader of both the spiritual and political existence of the planet, and if that doesn’t make you deeply concerned, well, you haven’t been paying attention. Interestingly, no one complains too much about the religious leader taking a political role; as an American who believes the separation of church and state is one of the smartest thing the Founding Fathers ever did, the idea makes me deeply uncomfortable, but on Bajor, the issue is less about the what than the who. Kira is troubled by the news, although in a conversation with Odo, she can’t effectively explain her concerns. Odo accuses her of blaming the Kai for Bareil’s death, and letting that blame cloud her judgement, which sounds like Odo has forgotten quite a lot of past history. Really, this is a woman who arranged an assassination attempt on a vedek when he stood in her way; who conspired with another Bajoran to drive away the Federation presence around Bajor in order to consolidate their control; has proven time and again her willingness to go to whatever lengths necessary to achieve power. The only reason her run as Kai hasn’t been a complete disaster is that she’s presumably canny enough to know how far she can go, and that a stable Bajor is, in the long run, the best chance for her own success.

But now that the government job is open, all bets are off the table, and it’s strange that no one but Kira seems to be bothered by this. The problems begin almost immediately. Winn comes to Kira asking for a favor—which means, of course, that she *demand*s a favor, in the politest, most cutting way

possible. A group of farmers on Bajor is holding on to a set of soil reclamators that Winn thinks would be better used elsewhere. She has her reasons, namely that the reclamators could be used to help the growth of crops that will sell better in galactic market, thus raising Bajor's status and making the planet more desirable to the Federation. Only, the farmers who are currently holding on to the devices were promised more time with them, and desperately need that time in order to sustain their own farmland. And it just so happens that the leader of these farmers, Shakaar, was also the head of Kira's resistance cell during the Cardassian occupation.

You can see where this is going, right? Winn wants Kira to get the machines back because of her connections; Kira, who probably feels guilty about her suspicions of the Kai, agrees to try. But when she meets up with her old comrades, she realizes they have claims every bit as legitimate as Winn's. So Kira tries a compromise, Winn snaps, and eventually Shakaar, Kira, and the others take to the hills, forming the core of a new rebellion which could, if everything continues to go as badly as it has, lead to a civil war.

There's a lot to like in this episode. I remain fascinated by post-occupation Bajoran politics. Most stories end when the rebellion finally defeats its oppressors, and the fact that *DS9* started in the wake of the Cardassian departure was always a point in the show's favor. It fits into one of the central tenets of the series design, namely the idea of staying in one place and seeing things through. A victory is only one moment; it's great while it lasts, and can mark the start of a better time in one's life, but the only permanent solution to any problem is a mortal one. While the Bajorans had a common enemy, while the stakes were obvious and incredibly high, the moral choices tended to be clear-cut: Either stand up for your people, or sell out to protect your own skin. Now that the obvious threat has been removed, conflicts become more complicated, and villains are harder to pinpoint.

Take the episode's most intense scene: Shakaar and the others lure their pursuers into a box canyon, believing that the only way out of the chase is a direct fight. Kira and Shakaar both recognize the leader of the pursuing force, a man who once served and fought in the resistance just like they did. They realize he's a strong fighter, and should be their first target. Shakaar takes aim, and the others wait for his signal—but neither he nor Kira is able to pull the trigger. They both realize things have gone too far, and move down to talk with their target face to face. But even that almost ends in catastrophe when someone fires a shot without orders, and the canyon nearly turns into a killing field. The speed with which former allies can turn on each other, without any real reason to do so beyond the immediate circumstance, is telling. Everyone is too used to taking up arms and fighting when life doesn't go their way. Violence was the necessary answer for so long that it's started to look like the only answer.

The only real disappointment, then, comes in the ease with which Kai Winn's ambitions overreach her. This isn't an episode-killing complaint, but the timing overall is rushed, especially when it comes to the story's resolution. Once Shakaar and Kira realize that Bajor doesn't need a civil war, Shakaar decides to run for the office Winn had assumed was hers for the taking. If the Kai tries to run against him, they'll reveal her inept handling of the reclamator crisis; the fact that she nearly started a major conflict over

a handful of machines (and how hard would it be to get some more? I assume this isn't a question we're supposed to ask, since no one mentions it, but still) doesn't speak well of her abilities. While it's satisfying to see Winn cut back down to size, there's something overly convenient about it as well. While Winn has always been on the shady side of the moral gray area, part of the power of her ascension is the implication that her methods work. She doesn't exist in a vacuum, and without the chaos and shifting uncertainties of Bajoran society, she wouldn't have done nearly as well.

So maybe her defeat is an indication that the people of Bajor are starting to get their shit together. That's a fine idea—I just wish it hadn't been quite so simple. Conflicts like this are more interesting when everyone is at least a little bit to blame, and Kira basically gets everything she wants without it costing her a dime. Nice as that is for her, it makes for somewhat muted drama. Still, Bareil remains dead, and hopefully this will help her move on from his memory. And maybe I'm just a little too cynical. After all, people like Winn have the DNA of their eventual defeat hardwired into every victory.

Stray observations:

- Oh, and there's a subplot about O'Brien having a really good run at the dartboard, before injuring his arm and losing his luck. Stories like this are the downside of the show's forays into light drama. It's pleasant enough, but the arc is so predictable and silly it barely exists. Although the idea of a Vulcan playing darts is pretty amusing.
- "So if I were you, I'd start packing." Concerns over the ease of the victory aside, it was really, really satisfying to see Kira finally throw Winn out on her ear. (And it's not like she's losing her position as Kai. She just doesn't get to sit in both chairs.)
- One of the (excellent) frustrations of Kira-Winn scenes is that Kira just can't compete with Winn's brilliant grasp of passive-aggressive control. Sisko, on the other hand, competes just fine, mainly because Winn has no real power over him. Their scene together in this episode is quite fun.
- I wonder if this episode might've worked better if it had focused more time on Winn. As irritating as she can be, this is really as much (if not more) her story than Kira's; she finally gets all the power she could dream of, and for the first time in her career that we've seen, she loses her grip.

Next week: We close out the third season with "Facets" and "The Adversary."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Facets” / “The Adversary”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[12/06/12 10:00AM](#)

“Facets” (season 3, episode 25; originally aired 6/12/1995)

In which Jadzia meets some ghosts of her former selves...

I’ve been disappointed with *DS9* episodes before, but this must be the first time I felt let down because an entry was actually smarter than I was expecting. “Facets” works quite nicely as a character piece for Dax. It’s intimate and self-contained, and Jadzia remains at the center of the story even when things take a turn at the halfway point. Even more impressively, the writers set up an obvious twist, and then go in a completely different direction when it comes time for the plot to develop complications. And that’s where my disappointment comes in. As silly as it would have been for a Joran-infested Sisko to run around the station terrorizing everyone, I was expecting some variation of just that, and the fact that the hour’s creepiness is relegated to a single scene surprised me. The episode makes more sense the way it actually unfolds, and it gives us a chance to see Curzon Dax in the Odo-flesh, but there’s a small, childish part of me who wishes we could’ve had more time with the pseudo-Hannibal Lecter. Although, let’s be honest here: that probably would’ve been terrible.

That caveat out of the way (and I want to stress, I don’t mean the above as a criticism of the episode; just pointing out how easy it is to both demand innovation, and wince when that innovation threatens to do something actually original), “Facets” boils down to two plotlines. In the main story, Jadzia asks her closest friends on *DS9* (the main ensemble, plus Leeta, who is adorable) to help her perform the Zhian’tara, a Trill ritual in which a host is briefly separated from and allowed to “meet” the memories of her symbiote’s previous hosts. This boils down to each cast member getting a chance to pretend to

be someone else for a scene or two, which is goofy and fun until the sociopath shows up. In the second story, Nog takes an entrance exam for a Starfleet Academy training program, and fails.

Both stories are about individuals trying to prove themselves against the apparent doubts of others. In Nog's story, Quark is convinced Nog is working hard to make a fool of himself. Worse, he believes that if Nog does somehow succeed in becoming a Starfleet cadet, it will mean the end of conventional Ferengi society as it now stands. It's been well established that Quark is a conservative of the old school, someone who passionately believes in doing things the way they've always been done. Nog is a clear threat to this, so while it's undeniably cruel of Quark to sabotage the test program to ensure that Nog fails his evaluation, it makes sense. In Quark's mind, he's just doing what's best for himself and his nephew, even if that breaks Nog's heart. But then, this isn't about Nog or Quark; the story is actually about Rom, who figures out Quark's subterfuge impressively fast, and reads his brother the riot act to convince him to stay away from his son. Again: entirely in character. But it's immensely satisfying all the same. It's easy to become accustomed to characters falling into the same patterns of behavior, and Rom is always the weak one, the apologetic one, the sap. But while he isn't about to run the bar on his own or start pulling in profit, he is very clear-headed when it comes to protecting his boy's future, and it's gratifying to see him turn the tables on Quark, if only for this topic.

Jadzia's story is less simple. At first, the ceremony plays out as you'd expect. Kira takes on the memories and personality of Lela, Dax's first host, an older woman who served in the government. Jadzia talks with her, learns a little about what this particular host has added to her own life, and then moves on to the next set of memories. Dax has always been one of the most difficult characters on the show to pin down, because the basic premise of her personality is beyond most of our comprehension. Odo changes shape, and there's no way to understand the freedom of that, or how it's defined who he is, but he's still just a single soul. Dax is the samplings from a number of souls, shifted and then reformed into a single, temporary unit, and that's hard to convey outside of prose. The Zhian'tara, then, is a way to make it easier to grasp exactly what all of this means. In a way, it's a shame this couldn't have happened earlier in the series. I'm not sure *DS9* could've done the concept justice in the first season, and Joran and Curzon both needed some build up for their reveals to be effective, but it at least would've made Dax easier to relate to. It's a bit like looking to your parents and your grandparents and the ancestors beyond, trying to find the pieces that made you; only Dax has these voices inside her head all the time.

Which is creepy, when you consider that means she's got to deal with Joran 24/7. We first heard of Joran in "Equilibrium," back when Dax discovered she had a secret host, an unstable murderer the Symbiosis Commission hushed up because of what his existence would reveal about their selection process. In "Facets," he spends some time in Sisko's body; as mentioned, this seems to set up an obvious story hook. Most other shows, if a crazy ghost is brought back to life, well, that's not going to have a happy ending. (Those of you who've seen *Angel* know what I'm talking about—and yes, I realize that wasn't a "ghost.") But Jadzia takes precautions. Sisko-Joran is kept in a holding cell for most of their conversation, and what's more, Sisko is in control of the situation at all times, like all the other temporary hosts. Joran may have some decent willpower, but he's still just bad memories. Their

conversation is unsettling and tense, and raises questions about Jadzia's suitability as a host that will pay-off later in the episode. But when things go south, and Joran tries to get violent, Jadzia hands his ass to him, and Sisko pushes the memories aside. And that, barring some twist in another season, is that.

This is the right choice. Any circumstance in which Joran was allowed free reign would've been contrived, no matter how tempting it might be for the writers to attempt. Instead, the "threat" of the hour comes from the least likely source: Curzon. He merges with Odo, and instead of simply sharing his memories with the shapeshifter, Odo's abilities lead to a bonding process in which Odo becomes a kind of makeshift Trill. What this means is, Odo's make-up changes to make him look more like Curzon; and Rene Auberjonois gives a lively, laughing performance, a fine change of pace for a character actor whose role usually calls for intense restraint. It also means that when it comes time for Curzon to rejoin with Dax, he's having so much fun that he refuses.

So that's a problem, but it's only really a problem for Jadzia. The Trill who ran the ceremony doesn't object to Curzon staying inside Odo, and Odo isn't trying to fight his way free. He likes the change in himself, which makes sense; of course Odo would like getting to be the charming, brash Curzon. Curzon fits in wherever he goes. But just because he makes Odo's life temporarily more entertaining, that doesn't mean he can stick around in the shapeshifter's head. His memories are a part of the symbiote, a part of Dax. They aren't Curzon at all, just a collection of his greatest hits, and they belong home.

It comes down to a question of Curzon's relationship with Jadzia; why he failed her from the initiate program, and why he allowed her to be the first applicant in history to be re-accepted. He was in love with her, and his feelings made him uncomfortable, and that's why he kicked her out. Then, realizing he'd made a mistake, and because he cared for her and didn't want to destroy her, he let her back in. This isn't bad, but it's probably the least interesting revelation the episode could've delivered. There's nothing wrong with the idea, exactly, but it tells us nothing about either Jadzia or Curzon. Jadzia is just a "beautiful, brilliant woman," which is we already knew, and Curzon is a charismatic ladies man who finally met his match in his declining years. An older man falling for a younger woman is an old cliché—happens all the time, but that doesn't make it a great story. The reveal serves its purpose; it gives Jadzia what she wants to know, and confessing it gives Curzon the push to finally leave Odo. But while the actors sell the exchange, there's nothing in it quite so powerful as the final conversation between Dax and Odo. Odo apologizes for his part in Curzon's games, but Dax tells him there's nothing to be sorry for. She's grateful that, because of Curzon's brief time as a changeling, she now has memories of what it's like to be able to change forms. And ultimately, this is what "Facets" is about. Not chats with murderers or the discovery of a long lost crush. Just Dax, proving to herself that she's earned the right to be a host by matching the only qualification that's truly necessary: endless, boundless curiosity.

Stray observations:

- Avery Brooks is excellent as Joran. His voice is just slightly higher pitched—it's not a forced attempt to be effeminate, but the sound of someone who you hope doesn't have access to sharp objects.
- I like Leeta. Glad she's sticking around.
- Dax tricks Quark into taking on a female host. It's funny mainly because Armin Shimerman really commits to the bit.
- The make-up effect on Curzon-Odo is excellent. Manages to convey both Odo's "real" face, and a sense of what Curzon must have looked like.
- "A root beer. This is the end of Ferengi civilization." -Quark

"The Adversary" (season 3, episode 26; originally aired 6/19/1995)

In which we meet the Enemy, and he is...

The unifying factor that has so far held together the different series in the *Star Trek* franchise is the belief that there's an Us and a Them; the main goal of both [the original series](#) and [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#) was to work towards as making as many of Them into Us as was reasonably possible. It sounds exclusionary, and to a certain extent it is, but there's also a fundamental optimism built into that concept which often gets overlooked. An Us implies unity, a group banding together with common interests and goals, and that means shelter through rough times. It means that even in the vast reaches of space, there's still somewhere we can go home to, places of safety and security the fighting never reaches. Even in the greatest battles, when Earth was threatened and all that stood between civilization and the lifeless sterility of the Borg, at least there was an Earth for us to cling to. Starfleet, the Federation, were concepts inviolate, and regardless of the bureaucracy and occasional dangers, they represented humanity and its reach to the stars at its most pure. Ignore the implications of condescension or imperialism. This wasn't about conquering. This was about cooperation, friendship, and discovery. A Them is just an Us you haven't met.

Cracks in the facade have been showing for a while now, though. *DS9* hasn't given up the dream of the unity, but it has addressed the way the base metals of the individual often react in ways no one can predict. It used to be that just wanting to be friends was enough; now, though, there are conflicting allegiances, religions, philosophies. Communication helps, but it's not a cure all, and situations arise in which there is no real right answer—in which the most two sides can hope to achieve is an uneasy compromise until the next great crisis. There's no definitive protagonist on *DS9*, no single hero like Picard of *TNG* or the Kirk/Spock/McCoy trifecta of *TOS*. Sisko may get top billing, but he's first among equals. All viewpoints are welcome, all are treated with equal respect. Hell, the mere fact that the writers worked to make the Ferengi more than just one-note jokes is practically a statement of purpose.

But all these different perspectives lead to new challenges, and in a way, that's what the Founders represent. While they themselves are unified, their abilities to take on different forms, to become anyone or anything they like—that's a different kind of threat. Where the Borg presented themselves as a single unit, one which could change its defenses and attacks as needed but which was always unrelentingly itself, the Founders are more, if you'll pardon the word, fluid. When you accept that others have as much right to their beliefs and opinions as you do, you become a (hopefully) better person, but you also lose the ease of distinguishing right from wrong. Friends and enemies are no longer as separate as they once were; Us is Them, and Them is Us, to paraphrase a line from Pogo.

On the surface, "The Adversary" is a well-made, entertaining rip off of John Carpenter's *The Thing*. *The Thing* is a terrific horror movie, one of Carpenter's best, and if you haven't seen it, it's well worth a look. In Carpenter's film (which is a remake of the '51 classic, *The Thing From Another World*; both movies take their inspiration from the John W. Campbell short story "Who Goes There?"), a group of men in a remote Antarctic research station face off against an alien which can mimic their forms exactly. This leads to a lot of paranoia, infighting, and a growing sense of horror at the implications of the threat. If they don't defeat this creature now, if it makes it out of Antarctica and to more populated area, the human race is doomed. There will be no way to prevent it from absorbing every human being on the planet, at which point it can move on to devouring all remaining life at its leisure.

The stakes are high, is what I'm saying. It's not quite as intense on the *Defiant* (at least, not at first); replacing the research station with a space ship means keeping the isolation, but losing the immediate danger of the threat spreading to the rest of the planet. Sure, if the Founder who cons his way aboard managed to keep his presence hidden for the entire trip, he could easily travel wherever he wanted to, but, well, that's basically a moot point. We'll get to why in a bit (boy will we), but for the purpose of this particular episode, the big threat is that the secret Founder, masquerading as an ambassador named Krajensky, will start a war between the Federation and a race called the Tzenkethi. At the start of the hour, just after Sisko gets his promotion from Commander to Captain (the former always sounded more imposing to me than the latter, but I'm not not charge), the fake Krajensky approaches Sisko with orders for a secret mission. The Tzenkethi government has been overthrown in a coup, and, supposedly, Starfleet wants to send a ship or two out to the sector to remind the folks who are now in charge of just who they're friends are.

This all sounds reasonable enough to pass Sisko's bs-detector, and it's not until things start falling apart on the *Defiant* that he becomes concerned. Things get crazy fast, and it's not long before Krajensky is discovered—but by then, the damage has been done. The ship is set at warp speed on a course to a Tzenkethir settlement; the weapons are armed; and Sisko realizes that if they don't get a handle on the situation quickly, he'll have to set off the self-destruct in order to prevent an inter-stellar incident.

This is where the *Thing* rip off kicks into gear. "The Adversary" never gets as intense or unsettling as the movie, since the effects aren't anywhere near as creepy, and, more importantly, the characters aren't already at odds with each other. There may be some unresolved tension between Sisko and

Eddington (who, apparently, isn't a Changeling after all, although he still gives me the creeps), but the main ensemble is a strong, centered bunch, so much so that in order to ramp up the infighting, the writers need to bring in some guest characters to glare at each other and throw out accusations. The real tension here is the growing sense that anybody could be anybody, and that everything has gotten out of control so quickly that there's no way our heroes will be able to restore order in time. The direction adds to the uncertainty in subtle ways, focusing on actors for a beat or two longer than usual at the ends of scenes; even if Sisko appears in control, and none of the leads ever break into a panic, the audience is given more and more reason to suspect everyone.

The episode's most blatant lift from Carpenter's film is in stealing the movie's signature scene: the blood test. In *The Thing*, Kurt Russell and company theorize that, given the creature's nature, every cell in it must be a distinct entity. Therefore, if a bit of its "blood" is injured—say, from a hot wire—it will try and protect itself. In "The Adversary," they realize that Changelings, being liquid beings with no internal organs, have no blood. The resulting scene is nowhere near as scary as the movie version, partly because the Changeling isn't a murderous, unspeakable monstrosity, and partly because they don't use the slice-the-thumb method used in the film, which is a lot more visceral than Bashir's through-the-uniform method. Alas, Sisko and the others make the classic newbie mistake and fail to begin the test by running it on the person getting the blood samples, which allows a fake Bashir to (briefly) frame Eddington, creating even more confusion.

Look, the specifics of the episode's plot aren't what's important. Everybody runs around in crazy confusion until the end, when Odo saves the day just in time, war is averted, and the Changeling is killed. While "The Adversary" deals with the show's ongoing Dominion arc, it initially appears self-contained. This isn't a two-parter, and the fact that so much of the story is influenced by a movie makes it feel less ambitious, a solid double instead of a more ambitious swing for the fences.

Of course, the Founder's death is important. As Odo explained to Eddington earlier in the hour (in the manner of one casually mentioning he only has a few days left until retirement), no Changeling has ever harmed another Changeling, but now Odo has gone and broken the rules. We're not given a lot of time to process this, but I'm sure this will have ramifications down the line. After all this time wanting to go home, but choosing not to, Odo has seemingly exiled himself from his own kind forever, basically by accident.

Speaking of ramifications: the endgame of *The Thing* is, we die. The most optimistic interpretation of the final scene is that everyone who worked at the station is dead (or will soon die), and the creature has been either killed or sent back into the ice. But there's no way to know, not for certain, and if it did escape, if it somehow took over one of the survivors without us knowing, then that's it. We're not equipped to deal with a threat this quick, this outside of the norm.

But *DS9* is the future, right? A future in which the existence of a wide variety of intelligent life is both known and acknowledged; a future with technology centuries beyond ours, with smart people (human and otherwise) working together to forge a peaceful and sustainable present. So, clearly, the Founders are just one speed bump on the road to Utopia, another antagonist to shake its fist, only to

fall before the force of cooperation and heroism. Clearly. Except the Changeling's last words to Odo are: "You're too late. We are everywhere." This isn't a battle just beginning. This is a war, and it started fifteen minutes ago. The fake Kajensky wasn't a desperate gamble on the Founders' part. He was just a plan, presumably one among dozens. There are other tricks to pull, other conflicts to start, and while the Federation sends out exploratory committees; while the Cardassians and the Romulans try their hopelessly out-manuevered surprise attacks; while Sisko waits at the doorstep, holding his breath and praying to gods he doesn't believe in—the enemy is here. And you're next.

Stray observations:

- Yes, that was a *Watchmen* reference. (And if you don't know what I mean, go read *Watchmen*!)
- I still don't know what Eddington's deal is. His conversation with Odo is interesting, as is his chat with Sisko about the captain's new rank, but it's all more suggestion than it is anything specific. Yet the character doesn't come across as vague or unsubstantial. Something's going on there.
- The device the Changeling uses to sabotage the Defiant is great; it's just a bunch of clear rubber tubes, but there's something freakishly organic about it.
- The episode also had a definite *Alien* vibe, what will all the duct crawling.
- "I don't understand my people all that well." "That's too bad." "Yes, it is." -Odo and Eddington, shooting the breeze.

Next week: We dive into the start of the fourth season with the super-sized "The Way Of The Warrior."

SEASON FOUR

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "The Way Of The Warrior"

[Zack Handlen](#)

[12/13/12 10:00AM](#)

"The Way Of The Warrior" (season 4, episode 1; originally aired 10/2/1995)

In which the Founders are coming, but the Klingons are here...

As always, checking into a new season means adjusting to a show which is almost, but not quite, exactly like the show you left behind. It's a bit like getting a new car—serves the same purpose in your life, but golly gee, look at all these nifty features. Like Sisko, sporting a shaved head which, combined with his facial hair, makes him look quite the badass. Kira has a new haircut too, and it's very cute. (She's still a badass, naturally.) After last season's scuffle with the Founders, Sisko has set the crew of Deep Space Nine do regular drills, trying to master the tricky art of finding a Changeling who doesn't want to be found. Everyone looks a bit shinier, a bit older, a bit more tightly wound—but not to the point of neurosis. There's just an inescapable sense that, the shit having gotten real, everyone accepts that it's going to continue to be real in the immediate future. This is one of the more nebulous advantages of ongoing continuity: It helps to set a tone so subtle we're not always sure it's there. Obviously Sisko and the others need to be on their guard for the rest of this feature-length episode, because the story needs to remind us that tensions are high. But that unease lingers. I caught myself looking at various characters and wondering if they were who they really said they were, and wondering what their motives might be. That concern will linger, I suspect. Nothing can be taken at face value anymore.

When a situation becomes this unstable, it's not just personal identities that are at risk. Alliances become strained, and where some see danger, others look for opportunity. The Klingon Empire hasn't

been a danger to the Federation for quite some time; when reintroduced back in [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#), relations with the warlike culture that plagued Kirk and Spock on [the original series](#) had finally achieved an uneasy peace. That peace only strengthened over *TNG*'s run, as each fresh encounter with the Klingons demonstrated how far a once mighty race had fallen, plagued by infighting, bad decisions, and an inability to move beyond the celebration of violence and conquest which had so long defined them. Most of these appearances centered around Worf, the first Klingon officer in Starfleet, an orphan raised by human parents who spent much of his time on the *Enterprise* struggling to define his idealized version of Klingon life, and the corruption and pettiness he found back on the home world. Not all these stories worked, but the show's willingness to treat the Klingons as more than just a fallen enemy did it credit.

The few times Klingons have appeared on the station, *DS9* has done its best to continue that trend. Without a Klingon in the main ensemble, though, those stories didn't happen often; besides, between *TOS* and *TNG*, it seemed like all the major Klingon epics had already been told. And yet here we are, with the Founders threatening war on all fronts, while the Cardassians and the Romulans fall back to lick their wounds, and the Federation preaches caution. Shouldn't someone step up, and do what needs to be done? Sisko is cagey as hell, but surely he can't be expected to save the universe from the Dominion threat entirely on his own. Surely he'd welcome assistance, especially if it came in the form of the entire Klingon fleet.

"The Way Of The Warrior" is a terrific 90 minutes of television, building to its conclusions slowly but without hesitation, using threats the show has spent the last three seasons carefully establishing to shift the main arc in an unexpected direction. Of all the possible danger our heroes might have faced, Klingons would not have been very high on the list. It's hard to remember the last time the Klingons have come across as dangerous on a *Trek* series. I don't mean on an individual basis; there have been plenty of fierce warriors on both *TNG* and *DS9*. But as a people? The Romulans were scarier in *Picard*'s era; Sisko had to face off against first the Cardassians, and then the shapechangers. A bunch of drunken buffoons tossing knives and pining for the old days hardly seem like a terrifying foe. Yet the presence of dozens of Klingon ships floating casually around *DS9*'s pinions isn't a joke, and regardless of what the fleet's leader, General Martok, assures Sisko, they aren't a comfort. Martok says the Klingons have decided to get involved with the Dominion War. That's great, but now they're just hanging around the station, harassing the locals and beating on Garak. Or worse, they're illegally seizing outgoing ships for unwarranted searches, demanding proof that every transport or freighter leaving the quadrant is Founder-free.

Trek races work best when they can hit two levels at once. The first level, the most straightforward and the one which inspires all that fan passion and cosplay and media tie-ins, is as convincing fiction. We don't need to know the Klingons down to their DNA (although I wouldn't be surprised if someone has tried to), but the more we believe they are a distinct species from our own, an alien race with its own identity and history, the more we invest in the stories around them. The second level is more nebulous: The Klingons should be a reflection of some aspect of human behavior. The better the

writers are able to use a species to show us a sort of twisted mirror version of ourselves, the more resonant these stories become.

You’ve probably noticed that these two levels are at odds with one another: The more obviously a *Trek* race is a human surrogate (or, worse, a symbol for a specific emotion or weakness), the less convincing the fiction. Balance works best (and I’d argue that it’s generally better to focus more on getting the first level down before worrying too much about the second), which is one of the reasons this whole Dominion story is so fascinating. Sisko and the others are the “normal” ones, largely because they’re distinct individuals. They don’t represent anyone but themselves. But the Cardassian and Romulan attack on the Founder’s homeworld last season was an example of how one natural reaction to a potential threat is to use it to promote our own myth of control and self-reliance. Tain wasn’t just trying to end the war. He was trying to use it as an excuse to regain his lost glory, to deny the weight of time and the arc of circumstance and make himself a king once more. There’s tragedy in that, for all of Tain’s cruelty, and the tragedy means more than just a grey guy with a bumpy forehead overreaching and paying the price.

The same is true of the Klingon plan. Martok, under the orders of Chancellor Gowron, is keeping secrets from Sisko. The fleet isn’t simply there to offer protection, or even to head off into the Gamma Quadrant to face down the Founders and the Jem’Hadar directly. Instead, they’re using the chaos to launch an assault on Cardassia. The Cardassian government has been recently overthrown by the civilian authority we heard rumbles of last season, and Gowron and his men argue that this revolt is actually a Changeling plot. It’s an assumption which is both somewhat reasonable (it’s hard to put anything past the Founders, really), and also calculated to offer the Klingons the greatest chance for glory possible. The Cardassians and Romulans tried to shortcut a war by attempting a surprise attack with little useful information; the Klingons have decided to exploit that potential war for their own ends, so intent on returning to the old days that they aren’t particularly worried about crossing every “t.” While their plans threaten to destroy the peace treaty they signed with the Federation, and while their attack on Cardassian space leads to the loss of innocent life, the Klingons aren’t exactly the bad guys. Their position is just understandable enough to put them in a gray area; while Gowron and Martok and the rest are overcome by the lust for battle, there’s every chance that they really do believe this is the smartest way to face off against the Dominion. It’s self-serving logic, but it maintains a level of complexity throughout the episode that keeps the action as fascinating as it is intense. The best part? The only changeling to appear in the episode is Odo. (Or so we think.) Just the idea of them is enough to make everyone crazy.

And when you’ve got crazy Klingons, who do you call? I knew Worf would eventually become a regular on the series; I even knew this episode was his first appearance. But it was still a thrill when, 20 minutes or so in, Sisko decides he needs some help, and puts out the call for everybody’s favorite dorky dad. And Worf is a dork, I realized watching this. That may not be quite the right word, given its connotations of ineffectuality and clumsiness; despite the many beatings he took on the *Enterprise*, Worf can handle himself in a fight, and he gets shit done when he sets his mind to it. But the character, and Michael Dorn’s slightly awkward, perpetually out of place performance, is stuck as the

party stiff, the guy in the corner who can't ever take a joke, and doesn't have Spock's ego, or Data's oblivious curiosity, to fall back on. He's hopelessly square, devoted to a culture of honor and sacrifice which no longer really exists, treated as a throwback by his Starfleet peers, and viewed at best as suspect—and at worst a traitor—by his own kind. Worf is, in fact, a perfect addition to the DS9 crew, *Star Trek's* version of the Island of Misfit Toys.

Using this as its starting point for the character, Worf's arc in "The Way Of The Warrior" looks to up the ante, transforming the Klingon orphan's tentatively accepted outsider status into something more like exile. The episode takes place after the events [Star Trek: Generations](#), and in their first conversation, Sisko offers his condolences to Worf for the loss of the *Enterprise*. The crash has left the former security officer adrift, and he's considering quitting Starfleet. Before that happens, he agrees to investigate just what the hell the Klingons are up to, and the answers he gets aren't pretty. I've already described Gowron's big plan; the main connection to Worf is that it once again forces him to decide between his honor and his people, a conflict which came up regularly back on *TNG*. The difference being, here, Worf's decision to stand with Sisko and refuse to join in on the Cardassian assault makes him an enemy to Gowron, and pretty much the whole Klingon race.

That, on the small scale, is a great example of what sets *DS9* apart. *TOS* never had enough continuity to worry about a status quo, and *TNG* would tease its status quo, but rarely break it. *DS9*, meanwhile, looks at the way things are, shrugs, and starts setting people on fire. The Klingons don't just plan an attack on Cardassian space, they follow through on those plans, with devastating results; Sisko is forced to attempt a rescue mission to save the Cardassian high council, and has to fight off a trio of Klingon ships; and then, once the council members are safely aboard DS9, Gowron and Martok demand their return before attacking the station directly. Sisko manages to hold out long enough for Starfleet reinforcements to arrive, forcing Gowron to stand down, but that doesn't make everything better. The Klingons refuse to give up some of the Cardassian settlements they've conquered, meaning they'll continue to be a dangerously unstable, power-hungry presence in the area. Which, as Sisko points out, is just what the Founders want. The victory is a temporary one, which is as it should be. As with the changeling threat lurking just around the corner, having Klingons next door is a great way to make sure no one ever gets too comfortable.

The gutsy storytelling is exhilarating, just as much as the action setpieces. And those setpieces are fantastic, full of the sort of cheer-worthy bravado and terrifying odds that make adventure stories great. Sure, the effects aren't always amazing, but it doesn't matter; if *TOS* could wring suspense out of two guys plotting against each other in separate plywood sets, *DS9* can do it just by having Avery Brooks steeple his fingers and contemplate his next move. Maintaining a building momentum throughout, so that the story becomes increasingly more engrossing as it builds to its climax, is one of the hardest parts about making a doubly long episode like this work. But "The Way Of The Warrior" nails it. The crisis develops and builds steam organically, and each fresh confrontation leads to other, bigger fights, until Sisko and his crew are staring down the entire Klingon fleet without blinking. "Right now I've got 5,000 photon torpedoes armed and ready to launch," Sisko calmly tells Gowron, and I'll admit it: I cheered. It was awesome.

Of course, the hour and a half wouldn't work if it relied entirely on its thrills to keep things moving. There's Worf, grudgingly binding himself tighter and tighter to Sisko and the station every step of the way, until finally, it's either give up on Starfleet completely, or stick in the one place where he's truly needed. (Adding a new cast member is tricky business this far into a run, even when it's someone as familiar to fans as Worf; I'll be curious to see how he's integrated into the show when it's not the end of the world, but I will say I think the writers handled the introduction, and his decision to stay, fairly well.) And then there are smaller, more intimate exchanges between characters, like Garak and Odo having breakfast together—which gives Odo a chance to demonstrate his ability to impersonate a mug of coffee—or Quark finding out Rom used his disruptor for spare parts. The dialogue is great, and none of these scenes, even when they don't directly impact the plot, come across as wasted or as padding. It sets the scene, and reminds us who we'll lose if this all goes south.

Or how about that conversation between Garak and Quark about the awfulness of root beer? Garak has just realized that his people's best chance against the Klingon attack is the Federation; Quark knows the Federation is the only way he can continue to make his living. Neither of them are very happy about this. So Quark offers Garak a taste of root beer:

Garak: It's vile

Quark: I know. It's so bubbly and cloying and happy.

Garak: Just like the Federation.

Quark: But you know what's really frightening? If you drink enough of it, you start to like it.

Garak: It's insidious.

Quark: Just like the Federation.

As much as the politics, the battles, Sisko's genius at out-maneuvering his enemies, Worf's uncertainty, and the perpetual terror of an enemy who can be anyone or anything, this exchange speaks to *DS9*'s greatness. These two characters are a small part of this story, and the Federation are basically the cavalry that saves the day in the end—but that doesn't stop Garak and Quark from being right. Just because we're all on the same side doesn't mean we have to like it.

Stray observations:

- All that, and I didn't even mention the reappearance of Kasidy Yates. Things are going well between her and Sisko, and he even saves her from an illegal boarding by some over eager Klingons. They make a good couple.
- We only get a couple Kira and Dax scenes, but I like 'em.
- "In war, there is nothing more honorable than victory." A very poetical way of saying "The ends justify the means," or, "Because we say so."

Next week: Break out the handkerchiefs—it's time for "The Visitor." And then Bashir runs into some trouble with "The Hippocratic Oath." (I'm tempted to just do "The Visitor" as a one shot, given its reputation. Make your opinion known, commentariat!)

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "The Visitor"

[Zack Handlen](#)

[12/20/12 10:00AM](#)

"The Visitor" (season 4, episode 2; originally aired 10/9/1995)

In which Benjamin Sisko comes unstuck in time...

I decided I was going to be a writer when I was 11 years old. Like most kids, I'd wandered around a lot of ideas before settling on this one; but once it came to me, it stuck. I'm sure my parents must have had their doubts, and they were very insistent on making sure I went to college and got a degree to fall back on, but they never tried to convince me to give up, or that it was an impossible goal, or that I was being impractical or foolish, or any of a thousand of the things a loving parent will tell their child when they're worried that child is making a horrible mistake. There was one time, it all came crashing down, the sheer improbability of what I wanted to be, the way the odds stacked against me like the elephant tower in Dumbo: ridiculous, roaring, and ready to collapse. So there I was, sitting on my bed, crying because I was lost and stupid and a failure, and my dad sitting next to me, patient, saying, "Well, somebody has to write the books. No reason it couldn't be you." Or something like that. It's funny what stays with you.

Sisko's relationship with his son has always been one of *Deep Space Nine's* best relationships, the sort of stable, quietly perfect bond that helps to ground both characters without ever really needing to be underlined. The two will get the occasional episode story from time to time; maybe Jake is struggling with Nog, or he has a new girlfriend, or he's considering leaving the station to go to school back on Earth. These are pleasant stories, mildly angsty on occasion, but there's never any doubt of the love between the two. So many shows think the way to generate drama between a parent and a growing child is to force fake drama, to turn the developing teenager into a self-centered howling ball of

contradictions because, hey, kids are crazy, right? And while sure, adolescents can be obnoxious, so can everybody; there's something refreshing and charming about someone like Jake, who can be a twerp, but is fundamentally level-headed and kind. The fact that Sisko is a good father makes us like him more, and works to contextualize the show's stakes and ambitions. Yeah, this guy's the head of a space station, facing down a mysterious and utterly alien threat, dealing with all manner of bizarre technical catastrophes and squabbling races, but he's also just a dad, making dinner for his son and trying to encourage him down the right path.

It's one of those bizarre technical catastrophes that kicks off the plot for "The Visitor," although we don't know that at first. The episode is playing us from the start; instead of the station, the cold open is set in a house in Louisiana, and instead of any immediately familiar actors from the cast, we see Tony Todd in old age make-up, moving slowly about the house, looking at photos (hey, it's Sisko!), and injecting himself with a high-tech syringe. We soon learn that this is, in fact, someone we know, and know well: It's Jake Sisko, all grown up. A young woman who wants to be a writer comes to see him, and asks him why he gave up his work. It's raining, and he's tired, and she's worshipful, so he decides to tell her. Why not. If everything goes according to plan, it will be his last chance to tell his story to anyone.

I knew the premise of the episode going in, so I wasn't surprised by the opening, but I imagine it must have been somewhat disorienting to fans of the show. But then, this isn't really like other episodes. It features most of the usual cast, it doesn't try and force us to accept a completely new set of rules and universe, but "The Visitor" is strange, and makes sure to draw attention to that strangeness without making too big a deal of it. This is a bit like a "What if?" episode; it draws on established show continuity, but much of what happens over the course of the hour is undone by the end, and won't really have an impact on future storylines. I've read this used as a criticism, the argument being that without real consequences, the emotions the episode tries to generate are somehow a cheat. To me, the oddness of it, the ephemeral quality of Old Jake's life and what he does with it, is part of what makes "The Visitor" so powerful. The truths here are built into who Jake and Sisko are. Here is the problem; this is how they deal with it.

My dad had a beeper. That's a joke now, thanks to 30 Rock and the existence of cell phones, but when I was 8, it wasn't funny at all. It was a small black device about the size of a cigarette pack, and when it went off, it screamed in a piercing, nasal whine that you could hear anywhere in the house. I hated that fucking thing. During the week, I didn't really think about it; Dad was off in Portland or the shipyard or Portsmouth, NH, fixing machines and drinking too much coffee. That's what Dads did. But evenings and weekends, my father was supposed to be home, and we'd sit around the table eating dinner, and the beeper would go off. Or we'd be playing a game of Dr. Mario (I always won), or just watching TV, and the beeper would go off. Or it would be Saturday, and we'd have plans to go to the movies, and the beeper would go off. Or we'd be headed to camp, and the beeper would go off. It didn't always happen, but after awhile, I stopped being able to trust that he'd ever really be anywhere. There was a time when the strongest image I had of my father was someone just a few steps shy of the door; whether coming or going, I could never say.

If “The Visitor” has a flaw, it’s that the premise is pure *Star Trek* hokum: something something wormhole something flux something warp core. Given the time that passes, and the nature of that time, the episode is vaguely reminiscent of [“The Inner Light”](#) from [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#), but there, Picard’s experience is created for a specific purpose. Here, it’s just an accident. Sisko gets hit by an energy beam and disappears. Everyone assumes he’s dead, but because this is *Star Trek*, and because Sisko is a main character, he isn’t. Instead, he’s kicked out of sync with standard time, and now only appears in the real world at intermittent intervals. Months and months after his own funeral, Benjamin reappears in his son’s bedroom, confused, groggy, and looking exactly the same as he did when he first vanished. He barely has time to say hello before he fades away. Jake thinks it’s a dream, but then it happens again, and this time, Sisko stays around long enough for Bashir to study him, and determine the problem. Which is, let’s be honest, basically magic. The technobabble is simple enough to make the right amount of sense, but the details of the crisis itself have no emotional impact. There’s no deeper truth Jake and Sisko have to learn about just what happened that day in the *Defiant*’s engine room. Before the ending, the closest thing to a reveal the episode has is when Jake realizes his father is linked directly to him—that the appearances are always around him, which is why they keep happening, even after he leaves the station.

Still, there’s something to be said for following through the real impact of one of those loopy sci-fi calamities that have always been a reliable plot generator for the franchise. O’Brien had his own bad luck with time travel in last season’s [“Visionary,”](#) but Jake’s troubles have a scope that earlier episode didn’t. Losing a parent is horrible enough (and Jake didn’t have any to spare), but he’s haunted by his old man, not just for a few days but for the rest of his life. Sisko isn’t dead. Jake knows this, but there’s nothing he can do about it but move on. There’s randomness to the event, a cruel lack of purpose or clear arc, that renders it impossible to get over. Jake tries. With Sisko gone, the Bajorans lose their faith in Federation protection, and they make a pact with the Cardassians against the Klingon threat. Later, Starfleet hands over control of DS9 to the Klingons, and Jake is forced to leave; thinking he’s abandoned his father behind for good, he goes to school, he gets married, he writes a novel and a collection of short stories. But then Dad shows up in the living room, and it’s like the past won’t let go. Avery Brooks and Cirroc Lofton do terrific work throughout the hour (Lofton gives the best performance I’ve seen him give on the show), but this belongs to Tony Todd. Old or young, there’s something sad and joyous wrapped up in him, and the look on his face when he sees his father again is everything. He’s relieved and destroyed at once. He gives up his writing career, he loses his wife, he sacrifices his own life to get back what he lost: not just the man, but the home that man stood for, back when life made sense.

Fishing at night is easier than I thought it would be. It’s easier than fishing in the day, almost. Dad and I go out to the raft after supper, and he gets a big flashlight out of the canoe. (I don’t trust the canoe, it rocks back and forth when you climb in, and I’m scared I’ll tip it and dump everything into the lake.) He turns the flashlight on, and stands it top down between two of the raft’s slats, shining white light onto the water, making glow. The light, Dad says, attracts fish, and he’s right; we don’t have to wait long before one of us gets a bite, but it’s a lot of patient tugging and swearing (from Dad) before we catch

anything. I catch an eel, and it is the ugliest, freakiest thing I've seen in my whole life. It whipsaws back and forth in my hands, and it's hard to keep my grip, but I have to hold on long enough for my dad to get the hook out of its mouth. He does, and I throw the eel back into the lake; I'm completely convinced the eel will remember my name and hate me forever, and that, when I inevitably tip the canoe over, it will be waiting. Dad asks me what I'm reading these days. I tell him I'm on the second book of the Foundation series, which I know he's read, because I'm reading his copy. We talk about Asimov for a while. The stars come out.

It's no simple thing, saying why "The Visitor" is so affecting. The hook isn't a doomed romance, or the power of science, or the horrors of war. Watching it for the first time, I was surprised at how straightforward it is, how moderated and undemanding. There's not a lot of shouting. Jake is more desperate as he gets older, but we really only see the after-effects of that desperation. We don't see his wife leave; we hear about it. We don't watch him quit writing; we just know he did, because the woman who comes to see him keeps asking about it. I suppose you could say it's not all that heartbreaking to watch his life come undone by bad luck and love, since he gets a do-over in the end. I don't buy that though, because Jake's agony, and his ultimate decision to kill himself in order to free his father (and, hopefully, himself), isn't about consequence. It's about showing us something that was already there, that was always there. I cried, but not when Sisko realized what his son had done—although that's an amazing moment, and the way Sisko is so immediately horrified speaks to his credit. I cried when Old Jake, woke up to find his father watching him, smiling. I cry thinking about it now.

The thing is, I see my dad fairly regularly these days. He likes to come over for the weekend every month or two; we drink beer, watch movies, and talk about books. Sometimes, he asks me how my writing's going, and I try and be honest without getting too heavy, but I think he knows I have my good days and my bad. He'll say something supportive, but he's got his own problems, because that's what happens. Sisko gets to go back in time, and dodge the energy beam, and save his and his son's life. And I'm sure they'll stay close for the rest of their lives, but closeness never lasts the way we want it to. I talk to my dad on the phone. He gives me advice about my car, and sometimes it feels like we're imitations of people we both used to be, like I'm a supporting cast member who left the show years ago, and only comes back for a guest spot when I need the money. This isn't a tragedy. This is how life works. Jake and Sisko will have many more moments together than they had in Old Jake's timeline, but after a while, that's all they'll be: moments. And we cling to them, no matter how many or how few, because that's what we get. In the end, we're all just visiting.

Next week: Happy holidays! We're off for winter break, but we'll return January 3, with "Hippocratic Oath" and "Indiscretion."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "Hippocratic Oath"/"Indiscretion"[Zack Handlen](#)[1/03/13 10:00AM](#)**"Hippocratic Oath" (season 4, episode 3; originally aired 10/16/1995)***In which Bashir and O'Brien have different ideas about doing no harm...*

You think of drama, you think of conflict; and when you think of conflict, the easiest conflict to think of is good versus evil. There's nothing wrong with that. It's a bit on the simple side, and it can lead to lazy writing, but plenty of great stories have a hero, and a villain, and get a lot of mileage out of watching them duke it out. But there's something missing in those confrontations. Or, to put it another way, there's something little too obvious about them. I mean, when it's good vs. evil, well, you know who you're supposed to root for, right? Hitler was evil. You certainly wouldn't want to root for Hitler.

Again: nothing wrong with that. You can get a lot of rich, satisfying emotion out of seeing some baddies get their comeuppance. But it's limiting if that's the only kind of conflict a writer ever uses, because there are only so many ways you can tell the good guy vs. bad guy story. The details change, but the basic arc will always be pretty much stuck in place. Occasionally, you could go for a downer and let the baddies win, but even that, it's the same arc, just with the consequences inverted. What really needs to happen to shake things up, to make things complicated in a way that allows for more shades of narrative as well as forces the audience to engage more fully in the result, is that you need to remove the "good" and "bad" altogether. It's just guys, gals, and whatever comes in-between. The conflict still happens, and it gets trickier to pull off because you can't just say "he wants this because he's evil" or "she will protect that because she's good." You've got to come up with strong motivation, the more understandable and relatable the better. When you do that, you have a fight between a

whole bunch of characters, all with different, but valid, goals, and no obvious happy ending to root for. And even when you do get to the ending, it's all awkward and bittersweet. Maybe even haunting.

Admittedly, this is just another long-winded way for me to describe the evolution of *DS9*, but given how the main story of "Hippocratic Oath" plays out, especially between Bashir and O'Brien, it felt worth repeating. This isn't as epic an episode as [the premiere](#); nor is it as emotional gut-wrenching as ["The Visitor."](#) This is what you call a back-to-basics hour, the sort of meat and potatoes entry in which the status quo doesn't really change, but everyone runs around a bit, some lessons are learned, and, most obviously, we have a main plot and a sub plot to fill up the time. It's very, very good, finding new ways to explore and poke at the Bashir and O'Brien friendship, as well as giving us some more information about the Jem'Hadar, helping the race's transition in our eyes from fearsome warrior class to fearsome, horribly exploited warrior class which might, someday, prove a valuable ally. Our heroes are held as captives, but they escape unharmed, as we know they would. But it isn't a happy ending, though, and that escape comes with a price.

The subplot is a lot more straightforward. Worf hasn't had a chance to settle into his role on the station (and the show) yet. He had a solid arc in the premiere, and the writers were smart enough to have him lurking around in the background of this season's second episode, but he's still new enough that we don't really know what role he's supposed to fill. More importantly, neither does he, and his experience on the Enterprise as the Head Security Officer has him eyeing suspicious characters in Quark's bar, and then getting fidgety when Odo refuses to immediately arrest them. It's an obvious plot from the beginning; given what we know of Worf (straight-shooter, sometimes to his detriment) and Odo (canny, and very, very good at his job), there isn't much doubt about who's going to wind up ahead in this debate. And it plays out as you'd expect. Worf keeps insisting Odo needs to do his job, Odo keeps explaining, with less and less patient, that that's exactly what he's doing, until finally, Worf decides to take matters into his own hands, and in doing so, messes up Odo's carefully planned sting operation. It's maybe a bit on the simple side, and it's not like *Trek* viewers haven't seen Worf humiliated enough at this point. But it would've been odd if Worf hadn't had a few growing pains on DS9, and Sisko's nonchalant reaction to it all takes some of the sting out of the embarrassment. Honor doesn't quite mean the same thing on the station as it does in Worf's head, and he'll need to get used to that, soon.

Thankfully, Bashir and O'Brien's encounter with the Jem'Hadar is much more intriguing. It's not just a hostage situation. (Actually, I don't even know if the Jem'Hadar bother to take hostages; more likely, if the leader of the group hadn't needed Bashir's help, they would've tortured the two men and then killed them.) Thanks to the genetic manipulations of the Vorta, the Jem'Hadar are addicted to a drug they call ketracel white. Goran'Agar, the leader of this group, is determined to break his men's addiction to the substance, and thus free them from Vorta control. He insists to Bashir that it can be done; he himself no longer requires regular doses, and he broke his addiction years ago, when he crash-landed on the very same planet that the Jem'Hadar, O'Brien, and Bashir are on right now. He believes that something in the planet's atmosphere, water, or plant-life may have helped him to get

off the white, a process which is normally lethal to his kind, but he doesn't know how to repeat this process. For this, he wants Bashir's help.

So we have Bashir and O'Brien pitted against a brutal enemy; we have one of those enemies making a half plea/half demand of the doctor, which puts him in the position of having to balance his obligation to help sentient beings in pain against the very real physical threat; we have a squad of Jem'Hadar half out of their minds from suffering the intermittent agonies of withdrawal, a race whose first response to any situation is violence; and we have O'Brien, the former soldier, dedicated to saving his and Bashir's life, regardless of Bashir's loftier ambitions. It makes for an excellent mix, and no one side comes out the winner. Or rather, winners in a situation like this are less a matter of moral authority, and more a matter of whomever walks away in the end. Bashir is eventually won over to Goran'Agar's position, convinced by both his own loathing of the Vorta's actions, and by Goran's behavior. Now that his addiction is no longer an issue (his body has developed a way to provide him with sufficient amounts of the white to survive), Goran'Agar is more thoughtful, less eager to kill, and easier to find common ground with. If it were possible to free the Jem'Hadar from their chemical enslavement, maybe one of the Founder's greatest threats would no longer be such a danger.

It's not hard to see where Bashir is coming from, and not hard to agree with him, but while he's getting to know their captors, O'Brien is getting pushed around and kept locked away in a cave. O'Brien has some experience with captivity and war, more than Bashir has had, and when the opportunity arises to escape, he seizes it without a second thought. Then, when Bashir refuses to join him, O'Brien destroys the doctor's work, leaving him no choice. This is arguably the most villainous act in the entire episode (well, okay, barring the whole "kidnapping strangers to do your bidding" thing), but it makes complete sense in context, and doesn't say anything negative about the chief whatsoever. He's doing what he believes he has to do, and if his view is a bit more simplified than Bashir's, you can't blame him. They are being held prisoner, after all, and if Julian hadn't managed to find Goran'Agar's cure—a cure there is no guarantee actually exists—both he and O'Brien would've been killed. In an ideal universe, the noblest thing to do would always be the right thing to do. This isn't an ideal universe.

In the end, our heroes escape, with some minor damage to their friendship. Presumably, the Jem'Hadar all wind up dead. It's not the happiest ending, but it's honest.

Stray observation:

- Another solid moment: even after O'Brien has destroyed Bashir's work, thus ensuring that Goran'Agar and his men are doomed, Goran'Agar doesn't treat him as the enemy. He recognizes him as a fellow soldier.
- I don't think anyone specifically references the Hippocratic Oath in this episode, which is cool.

“Indiscretion” (season 4, episode 4; originally aired 10/23/1995)*In which Kira and Gul Dukat go on a road trip...*

Another meat and potatoes episode; another split between main plot and sub-plot, with once again the main plot doing most of the heavy lifting. Standard TV stuff, obviously, and it basically works, but “Indiscretion” is a good example of a strong hour which might have been stronger if it had focused more on one single storyline. Sisko’s relationship woes are engaging enough, and it’s good to have this kind of comparatively low stakes drama on the show, reminding us that these are still people (or otherwise) trying to lead their lives in the middle of all this craziness. But like Worf’s story in the previous episode, it’s predictable, and there’s no corresponding satisfaction in seeing that predictability play out.

The idea is, Benjamin and Kasidy’s relationship is going well, and Kasidy has a new job offer from Bajor that would keep her in the system more regularly, and even allow her to set up some permanent quarters on the station. Sisko is uncomfortable about this, and when they try and have a conversation about it over dinner, his lack of enthusiasm upsets Yates, and she leaves the room. It’s the first big argument we’ve seen the couple have, which is important, but it’s also the most predictable argument two people in love on a tv show could have. She wants to take the next step in the relationship; he’s nervous about moving too fast. The fact that Sisko has backstory reasons for his nervousness, reasons beyond simple cold-feetism, helps the situation to an extent. He lost his first wife, and her death was directly connected to his line of work. He’s also the head guy on a space station which has gone through any number of dangerous crises in the last few years, a station which will almost certainly be facing threats in the near future. It makes sense that he’d be worried about having someone else in his life, someone apart from Jake, to be worried about.

The episode manages to convey all this, and the actors handle the material competently, but there’s no real spark to any of it. The most interesting moments aren’t really about Kasidy or Benjamin at all; it’s delightful to see Bashir and Dax teaming up to give romantic advice, or hear Jake relay his conversation to Nog about how Sisko should be handling himself. But to see their helpful tips put into action is, well, it’s okay. It’s not bad. I’m glad Sisko gets over his fears quickly enough not to risk a promising relationship with someone. But in the end, I’m not sure it was worth this much time to see something so rote unfold so rotely.

This especially true when you compare this subplot against the more ambitious, and more unsettling, main storyline. Kira gets news that there might be a way to locate a ship, the *Ravinok*, that’s been missing since the occupation. She had a friend on board, and there’s a chance that friend might still be alive, so she’s determined to find out what happened. The problem is, the *Ravinok* was a Cardassian prisoner transport, and once the Cardassians get wind of Kira’s intentions, they insist that she bring along a Cardassian investigator. After some cajoling from Sisko (this is, after all, the Cardassian civilian government; it makes sense to maintain as good a connection with them as possible), Kira agrees to take on a partner, only to discover, to her dismay, that the investigator is Gul Dukat.

It's a tricky pairing, and one I'm not sure the writers know entirely what to do with. Forcing two former enemies to work together to achieve a common goal is an old trick, and, when done well, a deeply satisfying one; there's something wonderfully optimistic about watching a pair of people with every reason to want each other dead gradually finding some kind of common ground. Only, Dukat isn't just a crook Kira's been trying to track down, or a soldier fighting on the opposite side of a war. He was the head of the occupation of Bajor, the leader responsible for the loss of hundreds, maybe thousands of Bajoran lives. It's hard to find common ground there, unless you call being in Hell the same time as the Devil sharing common ground. And Dukat's attempts to ingratiate himself with Kira are misguided, to say the least. His big pitch in the shuttlecraft is that the Occupation helped to make the Bajoran people stronger, made them harder and more confident in themselves; it's an argument that manages to be both insulting and self-serving at once, and for Dukat to consider it a starting point for opening discussions makes it hard to believe Kira doesn't just kill him right then and there.

DS9 generally does a good job hiding its TV-roots, at the least when it comes to the more unfortunate restrictions those roots carry. But of course Kira can't kill Dukat, because that would be too big of a shift—the writers are far more ambitious about changing the status quo on a galactic scale than on an individual one, which is how we can have war and chaos without any major shifts in the main cast. Mostly, this works. None of us want characters to die, and there's enough drama in the potential that the actual eventuality never needs to happen. But watching Kira and Dukat face off against one another is such an unsettling situation that having them play through the usual getting to know you routines never quite feels right. It's not that Kira needed to kill Dukat. But more acknowledgement that she had spent a good part of her life determined to murder him for his crimes against her people would've gone a long way to generating the right kind of tension. Imagine how this might have played out on a show like *Battlestar Galactica*, whose characters were seemingly capable of doing just about anything. Just acknowledging the possibility that something bad might happen would've been enough.

Instead, Kira puts up a good show, and for a few scenes even appears to be softening towards Dukat. It's hard to swallow, to say the least; Dukat's behavior makes him more sympathetic to us (we learn that the real reason he's interested in the *Ravinok* is that his Bajoran mistress was on board when the ship disappeared), but it shouldn't necessarily change how she views him. There's a scene in which Dukat sits on something sharp, injuring himself, and Kira has to pull the object out of his buttock. She then offers him a device to heal the wound, and starts laughing at the visual of Dukat contorting his body to get a better angle on his own ass. It's very strange, and not all that funny. I guess there's something to be said for reducing a monster to a fool, but both their laughter is so awkward and shrill it's hard to know for sure if it's supposed to be sincere, or freakish, or something else.

Things snap into focus soon after when Kira finally ferrets out Dukat's *real* real reason for coming along. He had a daughter with his Bajoran mistress, and if that daughter is still alive, he intends to kill her; if his enemies back on Cardassia learned of the young woman's existence, his life and career would be put in jeopardy. This, at least, is the Dukat we know and hiss at, a self-serving bastard with enough charm to make those qualities seem far more clever than they probably are. Kira is appropriately horrified, and it could be that the earlier, minor friendship that had been developing

between them served to lull her into a false security. It becomes her mission not just to find the survivors, but also to make sure that Dukat isn't able to follow through on his goal, and having them be antagonistic, while still forced to work together, brings a clarity back to their interactions which was lacking before.

The climax of the episode comes when Dukat finally tracks down his child, has his gun on her, and then can't follow through. It should be a thrilling, redemptive moment, a sign that Dukat, for all his coldness, does have some decency somewhere. But it doesn't quite work, because instead of thinking, "Yay, he didn't shoot his kid!", I'm wondering if he has some sort of ulterior motive for not shooting her; if this was all come kind of con to win Kira over. Ambiguity can be a powerful tool, but only when it serves the story's needs. In this case, my difficulties aligning what I know of Dukat's character with his behavior on screen robbed the episode of its intended impact. Which is why I wish we'd spent less time with Sisko's romance woes. The main plot of "Indiscretion" was tricky, and emotionally complex enough to have warranted more screentime. As is, it's still a good episode, but one that leaves me with a bad taste in my mouth.

Stray observations:

- Razka Karn and Lorit Akream; great names, but sometimes I wonder if the writers don't just dump a bunch of Scrabble tiles on a table and hope.
- The Breen, the aliens who held the survivors of the Ravinok hostage after the ship crashed, wear helmets that look a lot like oversized versions of the mask Leia wears as a bounty hunter in *Return Of The Jedi*.

Next week: Dax gets intimate with an old acquaintance in "Rejoined," and pine for rabbits in space on "Starship Down."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Rejoined” / “Starship Down”[Zack Handlen](#)[1/10/13 10:00AM](#)**“Rejoined” (season four, episode five; originally aired 10/30/1995)***In which Dax finds and loses love, again.*

This is a love story between two women. It’s more complicated than it sounds; there are alien organisms, gender-swapping, and past lives involved. But those are all devices to get us to that central romance, so it’s worth mentioning that at no point in the episode does anyone object to Dax and Dr. Lenara Kahn’s relationship purely on the grounds of their gender. No one says, “But when you first met, Dax, you were in the body of a man!” It’s irrelevant to the storyline. There are ways to tell this that could’ve dealt head on with the difficulties of re-establishing contact with someone you first knew (and loved) as a different person, but “Rejoined” is more interested in what happens after the reconnection. The script takes Dax and Kahn’s immediate, and intense, passion as an inevitability, which means there’s no real need to get into the logistics of the thing. In 1995, lesbians on TV weren’t unheard of, but they weren’t a normal, everyday sight, either; it’s refreshing to see Dax and Kahn presented so matter of factly. Yup, they’re women, yup they’re in love, yup they’re kissing. That’s not where the drama comes from.

The downside being, while I respect this episode and thought both Terry Farrell and Susanna Thompson (as Kahn) did good work in it, it’s not all that fun or exciting to watch. Partly that’s due to the straightforward plot. Dax hears that Kahn, whom she was once married to while she was in a different host (Torias—Kahn was Nilani, but I’m going to avoid using those names again because this is already confusing enough), is coming to the station as part of a Trill scientist team working to create

artificial wormholes. Sisko offers Dax the chance to get off the station during the testing, and we learn that the Trill have very specific, very strict rules about symbionts trying to pick up old relationships in new hosts. If Dax and Kahn make the mistake of ever, ever, ever getting back together, they'll both be exiled from their home, and their symbionts will never be allowed to take on new bodies; their experiences will die with Jadzia and Lenara.

So, of course, Dax decides to stick around; she bumps into Kahn; and the two of them reconnect as more than just friends. As anyone who's watched a fair amount of Trek knows, the franchise is hit-or-miss when it comes to romances, but I'd say this one is solid. The two actors have the right kind of chemistry, that sort of immediate spark where you know from the first second they share a scene together that they're going to end up kissing eventually, like they've got magnets in their lips and the room is shrinking. I hope this doesn't sound prurient; there's a long and deeply absurd history of pop culture exploiting women's sexual lives solely for the sake of arousing men, but Dax and Kahn's intimacy never comes across as manipulative or disconnected from the characters. There's an eroticism to their first kiss, but the emotional charge of it is as important as the physical one. The two come across as equals, and while we're only partial to their history through the occasional nugget of expository dialogue, it's never hard to believe that they're falling for one another. The whole thing seems perfectly natural.

But again: It's not very thrilling. Dax and Kahn get closer, Kahn's brother and team-leader grumble over it, Kahn is nearly killed when one of the experiments goes haywire, and then, ultimately, she decides to go back to Trill and let the forbidden relationship drop. This breaks Dax's heart, and the episode wrings as much pathos as it can out of the end of the affair, but seeing as how it's an entirely predictable conclusion to the story, the pathos only goes so far. It's definitely possible to get grand emotion out of well-worn tropes, but this doesn't come across as tragic, since it has zero consequences for the show. Dax briefly brushes into someone she once loved, but that was in another life, and while there's still a connection between them, it's not enough to power the entire episode. In order to be effective, "Rejoined" needs us to care about this couple, needs us to believe in their belonging to together as passionately as Dax does. Only, we *know* the relationship can't last, and because of this, it's difficult to invest much in the outcome; and without that investment, the hour becomes a slow, passable slog to a familiar conclusion.

There are fine scenes throughout the entry. I'm very fond of the lengthy conversation between Bashir, Kira, and Quark near the start in which the script and the actors do their damndest to make sure everyone in the audience understands the exact stakes of Dax's situation; it's a scene which could've come across as leaden and forced, but is instead, thanks to a light touching in the writing and the actors established rapport, is playful and charming. Also charming: Worf's brief monologue about Klingon dreams, and Kira's comment about how she never knows if he's joking or not. (Actually, I think the scene would've played better without Kira's comment, but I guess Worf's sense of humor is so rare it needed underlining.) And Dax and Kahn's wuv affair really isn't bad. There's not of the creepy paternalism that tainted so many [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#) relationships, and, given that they

both already know each other, their interactions are less about flirtation, and more about former intimates resuming the friendship and passion that once connected them.

It's just not enough. There's an "eat your vegetables" vibe to much of this, a frustrating and enervating lack of fun that a few fun scenes and Dax's brief walk across a force-field can't fix. Fun can come in many different ways—you can still have horror and misery in an exciting hour of television. That's something *DS9* has done very well in the past. But in order to work, there needs to be something beyond what we see on the surface, a relationship or bit of plot that digs deeper, and there's nothing like that in "Rejoined." We learn nothing much about the group of Trill Kahn travels with, we get no sense of the challenges of re-establishing a long-dormant love, and apart from telling us it's "unnatural" for two symbionts to try and resume an old affair, there's no attempt to understand the cultural reasons which ultimately drive these characters apart. It's shallow storytelling saved from complete tedium by strong acting and an admirable lack of stigma. Basically, the fact that it doesn't make a big deal out of its central coupling is really cool, right up until it isn't. But the kissing was nice.

Stray observations:

- It's possible to read the Trill objections to Dax and Kahn's romance as a metaphor for sexual intolerance, but that doesn't really work—after all, the objections have nothing to do with gender, and everything do with the integrity of the symbiont process. I wonder if the episode would've been more effective if it had done a better job explaining why this is such a taboo. As is, the threat of exile comes across more as a McGuffin to generate a forbidden love than as viable law. (I'm not saying I can't come up with reasons as to why it matters, but it's frustrating that the script largely ignores one of its most interesting issues.)
- When Dax needs a chaperone, she calls on Bashir. That's adorable.

"Starship Down" (season four, episode six; originally aired 11/6/1995)

In which Worf learns to be the boss, and Kira tells a story...

Here's how far we've come: One of the plotlines of "Starship Down" opens with Quark getting caught trying to cheat someone. Over the course of the episode, Quark first defends his cheating, and then manages to expand that defense into a statement of purpose for an entire philosophy—and the script lets him get away with it. Not just get away with it, but actually flourish. Quark's rhetorical triumph over Hanok (an unrecognizable James Cromwell) is just that, a triumph, and while he loses some money in the end, he's still basically a hero. The show has been doing this sort of thing with Quark for a while now, to the point where it's not as huge a surprise as it once might have been, but it's still charming, and effective. Which is probably the best way to describe the episode as a whole: there's not much in the way of gut-wrenching twists or narrative game changers (yup, using that phrase felt as horrible as I thought it would; never again!), but it's entertaining and brisk, and thrilling when it needs to be.

Unlike “Rejoined,” which focused on one storyline throughout, this episode starts off with one big plot, and then splits everything up into self-contained vignettes, pairing characters off with one another to act out small, short arcs before bringing everyone back together in the end. It’s a structure that we’ve seen before in *Trek*, and one that always reminds me of the disaster movies Irwin Allen used to make in the ’70s—something like *The Towering Inferno*, maybe, in which a bunch of actors get together and try and keep a straight face through a lot of really awful style choices. One of the big problems with the previous episode is that it put too much of the emphasis on a single story; “Starship Down” gets around this by cramming a lot of little stories together, so that even if one or two isn’t all that thrilling (I love Dax and Bashir, but their “Wow, it’s cold” scenes never go anywhere), it’s so slight that it doesn’t really matter. Admittedly, this sacrifices some power in the episode’s climax—the individual threads, while enjoyable, don’t add up to anything bigger than themselves. But it still makes for a well-paced hour of television, giving us glimpses of character in unexpected ways.

The first 15 minutes or so the episode seem to be building towards something else than what we get, as Sisko and the *Defiant* crew face off against a pair of Jem’Hadar warships. It’s tense enough to make me almost wish the whole episode had dealt solely with that conflict, instead of using it as an excuse to separate the ensemble into pairs and small groups. Sure, the Jem’Hadar threat does disappear, and Worf’s efforts to defeat them are sharp, but by fragmenting the focus, the suspense becomes less claustrophobic, and thus, less immediate. Once you realize where the episode is headed—and you should understand the design by the time Worf shows up in Engineering, if not sooner—than the threat of the Jem’Hadar loses much of its immediacy. Instead of a cat-and-mouse game of increasingly high stakes, we have something much less dangerous, a group of people who all need to learn valuable lessons about each other before the bad guys can finally be defeated. It still works, and it’s fleetier of foot and less stolid than “Rejoined,” but there’s a cost to that fleetness: the possibility of the unexpected, and the raised intensity a more narrow approach can create.

Thankfully, the vignettes are at worst fine, and at best engaging and moving. I mentioned Quark’s story above; his dealings with the Karemma in the Gamma Quadrant are what kick off the episode, and he spends most of the hour stuck in a room with Hanok, working to convince him of the importance of being willing to take a risk in business dealings. Like I said, it works, especially when their conversation is interrupted by a photon torpedo breaking through the hull, forcing them to put their differences aside long enough to diffuse it. This is potentially very silly stuff, and the episode isn’t shy about playing the scenes for laughs, but there’s a sincerity behind Quark’s dialogue that grounds everything, and makes it more than just comic relief. Again, there’s the suggestion that the Ferengi’s pursuit of profit isn’t as cold-blooded or venal as we were once led to believe; he’s greedy, but that greed is motivated by a deeper desire to get the most out of life, to prove himself, and to enjoy the thrill of putting himself on the line and seeing what happens next.

The weakest of the storylines has Dax and Bashir trapped in a room together in a sealed off area of the ship, slowly freezing to death and comforting one another by being nice. Bashir tells Dax he used to fantasize about getting her alone in a shuttlecraft under similar circumstances, which would be creepy and sad if the actors weren’t so comfortable in their roles and with each other. But even past the

weirdness of Bashir's confession (I tend to over-share, and even I'm having a hard time imagining the reasoning behind telling someone, "Hey, you know how we're dying now? I used to dream this would happen, only in a way that ended with us having sex!"), there isn't any meat to their scenes. It's cold, they're worried they might die, and then they don't. This feels like filler more than anything else, and only works as a sort of conclusion to Bashir's early determination to woo Jadzia; there's a nice moment at the end where Dax rescues Bashir from a tedious conversation (Morn!) and the two are clearly the best of friends, but, well, we already knew that.

Contrast that against Kira and Sisko's story, which doesn't offer any seismic shifts in their relationship, but does draw attention to something the show usually keeps in the background: the fact that Sisko is a key part of Kira's religion, even if he isn't exactly comfortable with this. It's a bit like a Christian working in Jesus's carpentry shop. You can spend your shift talking about dowels and chairs, but every once in a while, somebody's going to cross two bits of wood together, and things will get awkward. We learn early in the hour, we learn that there was a religious ceremony on Bajor that Sisko purposefully ducked, and that Kira isn't entirely happy with how much more distant the captain is with her, as compared to the way he treats the rest of the crew. Then disaster strikes, and Sisko is seriously injured, leaving Kira to wait by his side for help as the rest of the crew filters out into the ship. It's mostly just Nana Visitor trying to comfort the semi-conscious Sisko without breaking down, but it works, because the drama isn't so much the captain's survival (although Brooks does a good job selling the concussion) as it is trying to clarify what these two mean to each other. We've had plenty of time to see, say, Bashir and Dax hang out. We know where they stand. But while there's no question Sisko and Kira are on good terms (even when they fought in the first season, the mutual respect was obvious), there's an uncertainty between them, as he keeps her at arm's length not wanting to interfere with her beliefs, and she struggles with how to bridge the gap with someone for whom she must feel no small degree of awe. While Dax and Kira talk about this a bit in the beginning, most of Kira's conversation with Sisko is her trying to think of things to say to him; there's no grand confrontation or explosion of feelings, but in the end, they laugh, and after the crisis passes, Sisko invites Kira to a baseball game. It's deftly handled, really. There's no simple moment you can pinpoint where the wall between them is surmounted, and it wasn't that big of a wall to begin with. But there's a point to their scenes which is lacking in the Dax and Bashir segment, and one of the reasons it works is that the script doesn't go out of its way to underline its intention.

The same can't be said for Worf's lessons in command. While everyone else is struggling not to die, Worf winds up in Engineering with Chief O'Brien and his crew; they managed to port the bridge controls down, and Worf and the others work together to find a way to defeat the Jem'Hadar and save the ship. Except Worf's command style leaves a little something to be desired. Once again, we have Worf as the social misfit, the stuck-in-the-mud, by-the-book officer who needs to learn a little flexibility when it comes to dealing with others. In a way, this can be seen as an extension of his routine humiliations on the *Enterprise*, where he mostly served as someone who existed to be contradicted and/or beaten up. But there's a logic to his behavior on *DS9* that wasn't always there on *TNG*. Worf is driven by a desire to be honorable at all cost, to do the right thing even when it causes him discomfort

or pain; he believed in the old Klingon ways even when the rest of his people had given in to corruption and greed, so it makes sense that he'd be naturally inclined to follow the letter of the law without understanding the spirit. Not because he's an idiot, but because he's a perpetual outsider; and one of the things outsiders look for is a system they can grasp to help them belong. So it doesn't occur to him that being in charge means more than judging people by the same standards you judge yourself; he reprimands the engineering crew for minor errors and orders them around with little thought to their stress level or morale.

Thankfully, Chief O'Brien is there to set him straight. This is all fairly obvious, and, if the storyline had more screentime or was given much more dramatic emphasis, it probably wouldn't work; turning every Worf arc into an Aesop fable can only go so far. But because of the episode's structure, we only have a few scenes of Worf learning the right way forward, and the fact that the instruction comes from O'Brien makes it go down easy. The brevity also means that we don't have to deal with Worf getting irritated when O'Brien tries to explain the situation to him—partly this is because it's not in Worf's character to object to good advice (which is one of the reasons why he's likeable despite being sort of a tool sometimes), but it's also just a simple matter of logistics. All the storylines in the episode are cut down to the bone, which means they go down easier. When it comes to Worf, that means we get two scenes of him being a dick, then O'Brien politely mentioning he may want to reconsider, and then some very satisfying stuff with Worf taking O'Brien's words to heart. Like the rest of the hour, it's far from rocket science, but it gets the job done, with admirable efficiency, wit, and no small amount of heart.

Stray observations:

- Another positive to the Worf story: it's his efforts (along with the engineers) that end up defeating the Jem'Hadar. He may be a bit stiff, but he gets the job done.
- It's nice touch to have Hanok admit his people sell the Jem'Hadar torpedoes. Especially when the torpedo doesn't work.
- "It's very important you listen to me, because... because there's gonna be a test later." —Kira, flailing

Next week: Quark plays around with some "Little Green Men," and Worf and Dax go hunting for "The Sword Of Kahless."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Little Green Men”/“The Sword Of Kahless”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[1/17/13 10:00AM](#)

“Little Green Men” (season four episode seven; originally aired 11/13/1995)

In which Quark disapproves of smoking, among other things...

This is cute. The time travel idea is cute, the quick reference to American UFO mythology is cute, the semi-homage to science-fiction films of the 1950s is cute—really, the whole thing is pretty damn adorable, if you overlook the scene where Nog asks the nice Earth lady to give him a ear-job. But the best thing about “Little Green Men” might be everything else: the character moments, the world-building, the tone. The episode’s premise is attention-grabbing, but it’s a shallow, silly riff that exists mostly to get in some decent gags about how a Ferengi might see 20th century American culture. The concept is a grabber—Quark, Rom, and Nog wind up on an Air Force base in the US in 1947—but there’s barely any plot to speak of, and none of the sort of twisty storytelling that time travel tales so often indulge in. It’s a lark, and the pleasure of a lark is largely defined by the quality of one’s company. Ultimately, that’s the real selling point for this hour: getting to hang out with Quark, Rom, and Nog (and, briefly, Odo). Because why the hell not?

Nog is heading to Starfleet, and, as is customary when a young Ferengi male leaves home for the first time, he’s selling all his possessions to raise the necessary collateral to go out on his own. Rom explains all of this to the patrons of Quark’s bar with barely restrained delight, while various crewmembers eye Nog’s stuff. (Dax buys Bashir a holosuite program that, by its description, has to be porn; Worf is initially skeptical, but then gets super keen when he finds Nog’s old tooth sharpener.) The scene establishes that Nog is finally leaving the station, but it also serves as a chance to show off

the relationships between the episode's three main characters. Rom is still incredibly proud of his son; Nog is nervous about leaving, and excited, and determined to be the best he can be; and Quark just can't believe any of this is happening. It's the sort of triangle that raises all kinds of possibilities for confrontation and drama, and while we probably don't need to see Rom reading the riot act to Quark in order to protect his son again, it's actually a little disappointing the way this all disappears once the time travel kicks in. Oh, everyone still behaves consistently, and they all get some good lines (Quark especially), but there's no real thematic resonance to the brief adventure in the past. This may be the first time in the history of these reviews when I've actually complained an hour had too much sci-fi goofiness and not enough character work, but while the complaint is a minor one, I do think the second half of "Little Green Men" is more hollow than those first 10 minutes. Nog arriving at Starfleet Academy, saying goodbye to his father, maybe Quark showing just the slightest bit of emotion—that could've been something.

Instead, we get what we get. Which is perfectly fine, and it's my job to critique the episode on the screen and not the one in my head, so I'll let this go. It's just a weird split, and worth mentioning as still more evidence of how good DS9 has gotten at treating its characters right.

So after the usual techno-babble setup (leavened here by the fact that Quark's cousin's attempt to murder him via spaceship is basically the MacGuffin), our heroes find themselves under guard at the aforementioned Air Force base, studied by the military (including Charles Napier as General Denning) and Professor Wainwright (James MacDonald), who just happens to be engaged to the base's Nurse Garland (Megan Gallagher, doing her Megan Gallagher thing). There are sly nods to the culture of the past: everyone's smoking cigarettes, for one, and they all get really interested when the Ferengi bring up the Russians. There's also some miscommunication between the Ferengi and the humans, as Quark, Rom, and Nog's Universal Translators go on the fritz due to the proximity of an atom bomb. The best joke has Quark and the others hitting his head to try and jar the Translator back into place; the humans think this is some kind of greeting, and hit their own heads in turn. Less funny is that whole "misunderstanding" with Nog's ears. Look, you can have fun with the idea that the Ferengi's lobes are erogenous zones, but when that fun involves tricking people into going to second base without realizing they were up to bat, it gets icky. Say positions were reversed, and you had a guy tricking some alien lady into groping his crotch and moaning. That is a very different kind of TV show right there.

Still, this is largely harmless, and Quark's sudden decision to make the most out of these new customers, with an eye towards traveling to the Ferengi homeworld and jumpstarting their space program, gives Armin Shimerman a chance to add some edge to the proceedings. Nog objects to Quark's plans; there's a clever reference early into the hour to the Bell Riots, with Nog recognizing Sisko's picture in a guide book, which serves as a reminder of the dangers and responsibilities of walking through history. Yet after he makes his initial complaints, Nog never gets into the issue again. He and Rom pretty much roll over for Quark's ambition, and if it weren't for the fact that the American government is far more venal and prone to violence than even Quark was expecting, who knows what might have happened. It's one of the problems with the script, really. Events keep happening to our

heroes, and most of the decisions they make have no significant effect on those events. Yes, Nog's lies do provide the others with a chance to bust out of the interrogation room (and represent a very quick bit of thinking on his part; that boy's going places). And sure, Quark's attempts to maneuver himself into a position of power probably got him and the others into an interrogation room a little faster, but I don't doubt they would've gotten there eventually, whatever they said. It turns out Odo snuck a ride on the trip, convinced that Quark was using his nephew's trip to Earth as an excuse to smuggle goods (he was), which means there's somebody to come to the rescue when things get physical. And while it's Rom who comes up with both the initial time-travel glitch and the right way to get them all back home, he'd be screwed if they hadn't conveniently crash-landed at the right time and place for a massive energy surge, i.e. an atom bomb test. It's a little like the lightning strike in *Back To The Future*, but since Marty travels through time and not space, the luck doesn't seem quite so much a stretch. Plus, getting the 1.21 gigawatts out of that bolt of lightning is a huge pain in the ass, whereas here, the only real challenge Quark and the others face is escaping the base, which they do fairly easily.

Maybe I've been spoiled. I've seen plenty of time-travel stories, and I've even seen time-travel stories which specifically reference this place and moment in time (right down the tossed off Roswell reference); I'm sure if I hadn't seen any of them, I'd better appreciate what "Little Green Men" accomplishes. As is, it's far from bad, but depends too much on its premise to do most of the heavy lifting. Wainwright and Garland, while perfectly pleasant, aren't well developed, which makes their sudden decision to help Quark, Nog, and Rom escape seem as much a matter of plot necessity as character choice. (Their final kiss also comes across as padding, considering how long the camera lingers.) A clever idea can only get a script so far. This episode is good-natured, and it's not hard to see why it would be a fan favorite, but it mostly just seems like the writers came up with a hook, and forgot to reel us in.

Stray observations:

- Great scene between Jake and Nog early on, as they say goodbye to their favorite sitting spot. The show's continuity really pays off in moments like this; you can feel the time passing, just like the characters do.
- "All I ask is a tall ship, and a load of contraband to fill her with." —Quark
- Quark leaves Morn in charge of the bar. Morn!
- "We will kill all your males and take your females for mating." —Nog, warning of an alien invasion. (The cut to Nurse Garland right after he says this made me laugh; she looks weirdly melancholy about the whole thing.)

"The Sword Of Kahless" (season 4, episode 8; originally aired 11/20/1995)

In which Worf tries to game his fate...

The story begins, as these stories so often do, in Quark's: Kor (who we last saw in season two's ["Blood Oath"](#)) is regaling the customers with tales of derring-do and violence. While the crew doubts the

veracity of Kor's claims, they're all enjoying themselves, except for poor Worf, who's sitting at the bar, nursing a drink and wondering when he can conveniently slip away unnoticed. Dax isn't about to let this happen, though, and, doing her Dax thing, forces Worf to admit what's bothering him: While he's a big fan of Kor's work, he's worried his current status with the Klingon empire (i.e., "traitor") would bring them both shame if they were introduced. But Kor doesn't seem that put off at all by Worf's presence. It helps that Kor isn't a fan of Gowron, Worf's greatest enemy. The two share some drinks, and almost immediately, Kor spills the beans. He's not just hanging around Deep Space Nine to get drunk (although that is on the itinerary). He's found a clue that just might lead him to the most precious of all Klingon artifacts, a weapon destined to bring together the Klingon people and usher in a new era of prosperity for the empire: the sword of Kahless.

This isn't a bad way to start an episode. Kor even gets attacked by a mysterious alien who demands to know more about his quest, thus setting us up for some suspense down the line. And yet, while the opening scenes have all the hallmarks of a great adventure story, "The Sword Of Kahless" isn't so much interested in Klingon honor as it is in Klingon rage. And, unsurprisingly, there's a lot of that. "Blood Oath" was a straightforward "rage against the dying of the light"-style story, about old men looking to recover lost glory in one final burst of violent vengeance. This story is a bit more complicated.

Not at first, though. Once Worf realizes what Kor is onto, he wants in; and Dax decides to go along for the ride herself. Getting permission from Sisko is surprisingly easy, and while the captain only appears in one scene in the episode, his brief comments are a reminder of just how canny he is, as he immediately grasps that sending a pair of Starfleet officers to help recover such an incredibly important Klingon artifact might go a long way toward repairing relations between Gowron and the Federation. From there, it's some light detective work to get to a planet in the Gamma Quadrant. Gowron got a piece of cloth from a team of Vulcan scientists, and a quick trip in a borrowed shuttlecraft later, the three are standing in the ruins of the Hur'q civilization. The Hur'q are a race (their name is literally the Klingon word for "outsiders") that ran rampant on the Klingon home world a thousand years or so ago. They stole Kahless' sword (which, it must be said, can't be all that magical if somebody can just up and steal it), and after some poking around and lock-futzing, Dax, Worf, and Kor find the vault where the sword has waited all this time to be rediscovered and returned to its home.

Their moment of triumph is interrupted by the arrival of Toral, one of Worf's old enemies from the House of Duras. Toral is responsible for the alien (a lethean, which, come to think, is the same kind of alien that tormented Bashir back in ["Distant Voices"](#)) who attacked Kor earlier, and he's determined to claim the sword for himself, in order to bring honor back to his disgraced family. So there's the expected fight, and we get to see once again how Dax can more than keep up when it comes to hand-to-hand combat. (Later, we see Toral's men have phasers, but they're apparently reluctant to use them in the first fight. Wouldn't be sporting, I guess.) The fight lasts long enough for our heroes to escape, and it looks like we have the basis for the plot which will get us through the rest of the episode's running time. Worf, Kor, and Dax have the sword, but they're blocked from getting back to their

shuttle by a jamming frequency from one of Toral's men. So now they have to outthink and outfight their enemies in the caves surrounding the dig site, outnumbered and presumably outgunned.

Only, that's not really what happens. Toral and the others represent an ongoing threat, but they're really just an excuse to make sure Worf and Kor can't escape just yet. Because the real point of "The Sword Of Kahless" is how quickly the two Klingons turn on each other when they achieve their sacred goal. Kor goes first, reasoning that, since the sword is destined to bring his people together, and since the Emperor is a clone and Gowron is an idiot, he should be the one to lead the Klingons forward. Worf isn't a fan, so Kor starts taunting him about his past, insinuating that his time in Starfleet has made him soft, and not a true warrior. Worf responds by deciding he's the one who deserves to use the sword. Things go downhill from there.

I spent a good portion of the episode wondering if the sword wasn't somehow tainted in a way that would raise the ego and paranoia of anyone who held it; this isn't true, and while that means showing Worf in a fairly unsympathetic light, it also gives the story a more dramatic, and honest, edge. *The Treasure Of The Sierra Madre*-type plots, in which a small group of adventurers get their hands on some riches, and immediately begin to mistrust and even loathe one another in their determination to keep what's theirs, are always good fodder for drama, because they offer a chance to push familiar characters out of their comfort zones. With Kor, this isn't much of a revelation. He's been likeable in his two guest spots on the show, but with a certain edge, and to find that he can be even more self-aggrandizing and arrogant than he initially lets on is exciting—and useful for the plot—but not really illuminating.

Worf, though... Anyone who's seen a fair amount of [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#) (or, y'know, every single episode) knows Worf's history. A Klingon orphan raised by human parents, struggling to find his place in the world, living his life by the ideals he read in books, only to discover that those ideals rarely matched how life actually worked. It's a good backstory, and it's one that makes Worf seem a little tragic, a little alone, even if his parents are loving and supportive, and even if he has managed to find a kind of home in Starfleet. Yet few, if any, earlier episodes about Worf's past ever touched on the anger, the desperation which must drive him; the need to believe that his life, and all the suffering and loss it brought him, has some greater purpose. He tells Dax the story of his first visit to the Klingon homeworld, how he was mocked by others his age, and how he fled to the forest and hid in a cave, where he had a vision of Kahless. The vision (which I can't remember if Worf has ever brought up before) told the young orphan that he would one day do something no Klingon had ever done. Like joining Starfleet, Dax says hopefully, but Worf has his sights set on something bigger. The site of Kahless's sword has focused the frustration, the humiliation which has defined so much of his life, and he wants to use it to become the greatest of all Klingons. And if that means dropping anyone who gets in his way off a cliff—well, sacrifices and omelettes and all that.

The fact is, while Kor blusters and hurls insults, Worf's the one who commits the most violence toward his fellow travel hunter, almost choking him at the end of the episode before Dax decides she's had enough and stuns them both with her phaser. The story has a relatively happy ending: post-stun, Worf

realizes the error of his ways and decides that neither he nor Kor were truly destined to find the sword. Also, the Klingons aren't ready for it yet, or something—it's the kind of boilerplate "Let us never speak of this again" exchange that tends to happen when people, Klingon or otherwise, realize they've been behaving like fools. It's also maybe a little too easy after the violence we saw earlier. While I understand the show wasn't going to make Worf into a bad guy, and while I definitely wouldn't want that to happen, the intensity of his conversation with Dax, and his willingness to go to absolute lengths to do what he believes needs to be done, suggest an aspect of his character we've never seen before, one that deserves more attention than a quick cut and three minutes of friendliness. Hopefully, we'll come back to this soon. It reminds me a little of my favorite moment in *The Avengers*, when Captain America tells Bruce Banner it'd be a good time to get angry, and Banner says, "That's my secret. I'm always angry." Worf seems like such a gruff, stoic stick-in-the-mud so much of the time, but maybe that's a choice he makes. Maybe it's better to be a bit stiff, a bit awkward and weird and obsessed with the rules. Otherwise, he might start tearing off limbs.

Stray observations:

- I love the shot of the sword floating through space. It's hard to doubt Worf's commitment to destiny; only someone with deep faith could believe that sword will ever be found again.

Next week: We have a bit of fun with "Our Man Bashir," and then things get serious with Sisko on the "Homefront."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Our Man Bashir”/“Homefront”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[1/24/13 10:00AM](#)

“Our Man Bashir” (season 4, episode 9; originally aired 11/27/1995)

In which the world is not enough, but tomorrow never dies, so Bashir and Garak get a quantum of solace from Russia with love, for your eyes only...

Well, this is also cute. And thankfully, a bit better paced than [“Little Green Men”](#); comic episodes only work if they’ve got some momentum behind them, and cutting between Bashir and Garak in the holosuite, and Eddington, Odo, Quark, and Rom in the station, keeps things moving nicely. Plus, there’s a clear sense of danger, and a very obvious structure, drawn from the Bond films that Bashir’s program looks to emulate/parody. The jokes are obvious, but enough of them are funny that it doesn’t really matter, and besides, it’s not like the source material was all that subtle to begin with. (Dr. Honey Bear might be over the line, but I’m surprised Mona Luvsitt wasn’t a character in *Diamonds Are Forever*. It’s a damn sight better than “Plenty O’Toole.”) And once again, we can see the benefit of *DS9*’s stationary location and on-going continuity. “Our Man Bashir” only gets heavy for about a scene, but it’s a very good scene, and it works based off of what we know about the episode’s two leads. Plus, there are small touches throughout to make sure we can connect what we’re seeing to the larger narrative. It’s a great way to handle serialization: not every story has to advance the main plot, but the more we feel like it’s all connected, the more invested we become.

On the whole, *DS9* has avoided holo-centric premises, which is for the best. While *Star Trek: The Next Generation* had some fun with the idea of a magic room which generated new realities with the push

of a button, but it's a pretty ridiculous concept which the series was never all that interested in exploring to its logical conclusions. Such a device would be even more out of place on DS9. Quark has his holosuites, they're routinely referenced, but they're rarely, if ever, plot-relevant. Out of sight, out of mind. But here comes "Our Man Bashir," with what looks like the platonic ideal of the holo-story. The good doctor is engaging in some pre-work shenanigans, fighting a bad guy and wooing a blonde in a low cut dress, when Garak wanders in, applauding the theatrics. An argument ensues, and we learn the fascinating tidbit that it's actually illegal to interrupt someone else's holo-program without their explicit permission. But Bashir finally accepts Garak won't be put off; the tailor wants to know just what's been keeping Bashir so busy lately, and, when he discovers Julian is pretending to be a spy, you can imagine the reaction. The two of them go for a team-up, just as a horrific shuttlecraft accident strands Sisko, Kira, Dax, O'Brien, and Worf in the station's computers. And who do you think pops up in Bashir's program? Guess.

The funniest part of all holodeck/suite stories is that they always have to go out of their way to eliminate what would be the device's biggest appeal: namely, the ability to engage in action and adventure without having to worry about consequences. I'd love to be able to pretend I was Indiana Jones for a couple hours, but if "pretending" meant the very real chance that I'd get shot, chopped up, drowned, stabbed, or crushed, I wouldn't be nearly as interested. So holo-programs come with safety protocols built in, but somehow, because this is all crazy computer stuff (again: magic), the bad guys Bashir faces off against could theoretically hurt him, which means that if the safety protocols are removed, he's in for a world of hurt. And yes, the safety protocols are removed in this episode. It happens every damn time, or nearly. It's like having a really amazing TV in your house, only if there's a glitch, or the batteries in the remote go dead, the TV will murder you. Everyone in the Trek-verse accepts this as a matter of course, but while I'm sure a holodeck experience would be remarkable, I don't think I'd be so cavalier using the device if I knew there was a one in five chance I set myself on fire. I'm not saying they shouldn't exist, because it's amazing technology. But they put safety bars on the roller coaster for a reason, y'know?

In a shocking twist, Bashir's crewmembers start popping into his fantasy life; first Kira, as his sexy Russian friend (yes, Nana Visitor is good at this), then O'Brien as Falcon, Bashir's eye-patched nemesis, and so on. It's a bit like a twist on [Barclay's first TNG episode](#), only here, instead of Barclay using the holodeck to enact his fantasies with people he can't bear to deal with in real life, Bashir is forced to keep his made up world going if he wants to save the lives of his friends. There's some tech speak going on—buffers and what not. When the shuttle exploded, the computer stored the physical patterns of the crew inside Bashir's holosuite, while using the entirety of the rest of the station to store their substantially larger neural patterns. Which, okay, I'll buy it, and it gives us some fun moments with Eddington having to team up with Rom to find a work around to reconnect everybody. (I especially liked the reveal that Rom has had to MacGyver up the holosuite circuit boards because Quark won't put down any money for upgraded equipment.) As always with premises like this, what matters is if the ends (ie, Bashir and Garak playing spy on Earth of the late '60s) justify the means.

I'd say they do, although it depends on your fondness for Bond riffs. Most of the gags are relegated to the immediate shock of seeing familiar faces in unfamiliar roles, and anyone looking for a cutting satire of Bond's Imperialist masculine bullshit shouldn't get their hopes up; the darkest this gets is a silly moment near the end when Bashir saves himself and Garak by telling Dax she'd look prettier without her glasses and with her hair down. But it is undeniably nifty to watch Kira bust out a Russian accent, or Worf playing the heavy in a tux. As for who comes off the best, I have a hard time picking, but it's hard to deny Avery Brooks utter awesomeness as the world-destroying arch-villain Dr. Noah. (Get it? Get it?) Brooks has always had a taste for scenery, and he indulges himself at the episode's climax to great effect, SHOUTING and whispering in ways that make him seem threatening, brilliant, and almost certainly psychotic.

"Our Man Bashir" also gets some mileage out of Garak's astonishment at this particular brand of espionage, although not as much as I was expecting. He throws out a few one liners, and they're all good ones, but it turns out his real reason for appearing in the episode was to give the writers yet another chance to take a look at the weird edges that exist between the ex-member of the Obsidian Order, and our noble doctor. Once Garak realizes that they're playing for keeps, he starts encouraging Bashir to be more ruthless in his work; yes, Julian wants to save everyone, but sometimes you just can't do that, and to Garak, that means cutting costs and running as soon as the odds are slightly less than favorable. Bashir resists, which builds to a confrontation where the doctor draws a gun on Garak, who's threatening to shut down the program and escape. (Shutting down the program has a good chance of killing Sisko and the others outright.) Garak doesn't believe Bashir has the guts to pull the trigger, but when he calls for the doors, Bashir fires, injuring the tailor and defusing the situation.

It's the only time in the whole hour when the light-hearted tone trembles. (Well, it's not like Eddington and Odo are yukking it up, but I can't imagine watching this and being all that concerned about the fate of the crew.) Later, at the conclusion of the spy program, Julian quotes some of Garak's words to Dr. Noah, stalling for time by giving up being the good guy and helping to destroy the world. Which is amusing, but not particularly subversive; Bashir has already demonstrated his willingness to put his friends above all other considerations, and if that means killing imaginary billions, so be it. That earlier scene, though, is telling. It doesn't exactly reveal anything we don't already well know—Bashir is an idealist, Garak is a pragmatist—but it does reinforce once more the the courage of the doctor's convictions, and the strength those convictions give him. Garak may well mock Bashir's naivete, but Bashir saves the day, (sort of) gets the girl, and blows up the world. All Garak gets is a neck wound.

Stray observations:

- "If I were in your shoes, I would grab a bottle of champagne and shoot me." -Garak
- So, does Bashir ever actually have sex with any of the ladies in this program? I wonder if you're required to clean the suite before you leave.
- This is a small point, but the reason Bashir won't kill Sisko or the others is that apparently the program will delete their file if they die. That can't be standard practice, can it? Holo-programs have to be designed for multiple uses.

- “I think I joined the wrong intelligence program.” -Garak
- I love how Bashir and Garak change out of their tuxedos for a single scene, and then put the tuxedos back on.
- “I must say, doctor, this is more than I ever wanted to know about your fantasy life.” -Garak
- “You’re a man who dreams of being a hero, because you know, deep down, you’re not.” -Garak, just before he’s proven wrong. (God, I could write a paper about that guy. His need to believe everyone else is as cowardly as he is, combined with the fact that there is just enough decency in him to make him miserable, is endlessly fascinating.)

“Homefront” (season 4, episode 10; originally aired 1/1/1996)

In which Sisko and Odo keep watching the skies...

There’s something horrible about the way Odo talks about his fellow Changelings. The show doesn’t make a huge effort to underline this, and I’m not even sure how intentional it is; but whenever he’s discussing strategy with Sisko, or with other Starfleet officers, his comments on how “my people” largely serve to remind us of how alone he is. Sure, he’s on the same side as the rest of the show’s ensemble, which makes him a hero. Sure, trying to stop the Founders from murdering humans and kicking off any number of inter-stellar wars fits most acceptable definitions of doing the right thing. But Odo’s actions made him a traitor even before he became the first Changeling to harm (and kill) one of his own kind. Viewed in a different light, he’s a Judas, a monster first pitied, then despised. While we’ve had glimpses of Odo’s true feelings about the situation (most notably in “The Die Is Cast”), he doesn’t reveal himself willingly, so all we get is the occasional pained look, and the “my” he always adds to “people.” He’s made his choice, but Odo being Odo, he can’t let go of his guilt.

“Homefront” gives us our first glimpse of the fallout from the Changeling death in ["The Adversary,"](#) and the signs aren’t promising. It’s a short scene: after an apparent Changeling attack leaves 27 Federation diplomats dead, Sisko, Jake, and Odo head to Earth to help advise Starfleet on how to buff up security and deal with the potential threat. Midway through the episode, Odo runs into a pair of officers he’s met before; everything seems fine, but one of the officers (Admiral Leyton, a friend of Sisko’s played by Robert Foxworth) starts throwing some shade. Odo, realizing something is up, grab’s “Leyton”’s arm, only to find a shapeshifter, who mocks him and quickly escapes. Recounting the incident, Odo mentions the hostility, but leaves the more obvious, shocking fact unspoken: the Changeling’s hatred for Odo was so intense he couldn’t mask it long enough to keep up his cover. Given how good the shapeshifters have been at hiding themselves before now, that’s a whole lot of rage.

That ability to move around hidden in plain sight is one of the driving fears of the episode, a growing paranoia that starts off sensible enough (higher security precautions, phaser sweeps, renewed vigilance) before slowly spinning out of control. Well, not quite out of control; one of the episode’s smarter choices is that each decision Sisko makes seems reasonable, even prudent. It’s hard to pick out any one moment where he and the others cross the line, but one minute, they’re checking the

rooms of government personnel for duplicitous desk lamps, and the next, Sisko is yelling at his father for refusing a blood test. Then the power goes out, and it's time to declare martial law. (Well, not exactly martial law, but close enough.) Given the time we've spent getting to know Sisko, we're well aware he's not a man prone to rash decisions, and certainly not a proto-fascist looking for his chance to shine. As well, Leyton and Commander Erika Benteen (Sisko's other contact person, played by [Geordi's former flame](#) Susan Gibney) seem like reasonable adults. Leyton maybe not so much; when we get to part two next week, I won't be unduly surprised if he's got some ulterior motives. But so far, no one has stepped over any obvious lines.

The problem with a lot of parables about the horrors of paranoia, and the way war and xenophobia can crush the human spirit, is that they're rarely subtle. Something like ["The Monsters Are Due On Maple Street"](#) gets its power by showing seemingly normal humans react poorly in extraordinary circumstances, with those circumstances ostensibly demonstrating some archetypal weakness in us all. And sure, that's a great episode of television, and the lack of subtlety can, if well-handled, generate powerful drama. But it's always so easy to watch the situation from the outside and tell ourselves, "I would never go that far." "Homefront" doesn't allow us that comfort. It's not a grim hour by any stretch of the imagination, and at no point does someone say, "Makes you wonder who the real monsters are." (Although Sisko comes close.) Theoretically, the conclusion to the story (which we'll cover next week) could completely justify all of Sisko and Leyton's precautions. But if it doesn't, the road we've travelled to get to that point is one that's lacked obvious signposts. It's a bad moment when Sisko realizes he was beginning to doubt his dad's humanity, but it's also one in which the combination of Joseph Sisko's actions and the potential Changeling threat made it impossible to not have certain suspicions. The ideal of a free world where everyone is judged by their actions, where no one is the enemy until he proves himself so, is a beautiful one. But it's not easy to come by, and the episode never makes the mistake of simplifying its morality.

It also finds time to deal with some fairly meaty family drama. Dealing with a parent who refuses to acknowledge his age and limitations is a common theme for TV drama, but watching Sisko struggle to understand his fathers is decent stuff even before it dovetails with the Changeling hunt. Joseph Sisko (the always welcome Brock Peters) is big-hearted, cheerful, and very stubborn, and his failing health is the closest the episode comes to a sub-plot. Both Benjamin and Jake are worried about him, and from what we see, they have cause for concern; the old man still works long hours, pushing food on his customers, regaling the room with stories and patter, and staying on his feet until he's close to collapse. In a way, he's being short-sighted and childish, refusing to accept and adjust to his age, but he argues that this is his decision, and one he has every right to make. It's easy to be annoyed with him when he's batting off his son and grandson's concern, but the episode (and Peters) do a good job making sure he isn't a caricature or a fool. And while the character can be off-putting, that works to make the eventual confrontation between him and Sisko all the more powerful. Joe's refusal to take a blood test, combined with his lack of appetite and unwillingness to see a doctor, make him suspicious; and yet all this is consistent with the character of someone who is trying to face old age on his own terms. And while requiring blood tests for all high level personnel and their families doesn't seem

unreasonable in the face of the shapeshifter threat, it's still invading someone's rights without anything approaching justifiable cause. There's no easy answer here, and that ambiguity makes the situation all the more intense; it's hard to tell yourself you'd do the right thing when you don't know what the right thing is.

Of course, it's not all doom and slippery slopes. "Homefront" demonstrates once again how adept *DS9* has gotten at managing the time requirements of two-part storylines, using padding to reinforce and develop the main ensemble. There's a cute bit at the beginning about Dax pranking Odo; apparently she's been breaking into his quarters while he's in his liquid state and moving his furniture around. In another context, this could've come off as mean-spirited, especially given how much importance Odo places in his version of feng shui, but Dax's behavior instead reminds us of how relaxed everyone on the station has become with one another. Setting Jadzia, whose life experiences have made her more relaxed, adventurous, and friendly, against Odo's stone-faced sincerity, works to both their advantages, enough so that I'd love to see the two of them team-up for a story or two at some point.

There's also a frankly adorable scene where we learn that Bashir and O'Brien have taken to running aviator programs in the holosuites to deal with their stress over events on Earth; as they're both stuck on the station, all they can really do is watch the news as it comes in, and on their off hours, dress up like flying aces and defend Britain from the evil Germans. O'Brien's accent is hilarious, and their grief over the loss of one of their fellow pilots is nearly as funny, especially when set against Quark's confusion. Good comic sequences are valuable in their own right, but this one also manages to once again demonstrate the awesomeness that is the Bashir and O'Brien friendship, as well as giving us a quick glimpse into just how shocking the attack on the home planet is.

That shock is important; along with everything else discussed above, it helps to justify the episode's finale, in which Leyton and Sisko urge (demand, really) that the Federation President declare a state of emergency. The power goes out, apparently over the entire world (which is impressive), and Sisko is worried a fleet of Jem'Hadar ships might be on their way to Earth. There's no definitive proof that he's right, just as no one has any idea what the Changelings' real plans are. But in the dark, when you can't tell friend from foe, and the night stretches on forever, it's hard to see what lines you're crossing when you're rushing to bar the door.

Stray observations:

- Forgot to mention: the wormhole has been opening at seemingly random intervals, with no obvious sign of any ships coming through. Some Bajorans (including Kira) believe it's a message from the prophets, but Sisko and Leyton use it as yet more potential proof of the invasion threat. The Jem'Hadar could have a cloaking device, after all.

Next week: We see what happens next in the optimistically titled "Paradise Lost," and try not to get caught in the "Crossfire."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Paradise Lost”/“Crossfire”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[1/31/13 10:00AM](#)

“Paradise Lost” (season 4, episode 11; originally aired 1/8/1996)

In which Sisko has this crazy conspiracy theory...

The only real criticism I can think of for this episode is Admiral Leyton’s use of the Red Squad to carry out his plans. If you squint hard enough, it’s sort of justifiable. Leyton needs a group to sabotage the power relays, but it can’t be one that’ll question his orders, or one that he won’t be able to sufficiently manipulate and move around in the aftermath to cover his tracks. But still—the planet-wide blackout is one of the key parts of his master plan. To leave it in the hands of a bunch of cadets, no matter how well-trained and eager, seems to be inviting disaster. They’re the best of their class, and so they’ll probably pull it off, but even if they do, how are you going to make sure they never tell anyone? I’m sure Leyton told a great story, and I recognize power of authority, and the incredible pressure these young people are most likely under; given how hard it is for Sisko to go against his fellow officers, it’s not unimaginable that the students would have even greater qualms. Still, it’s a bit sloppy, especially seeing as how Leyton doesn’t start shifting personnel around until after Sisko is on to him. If it wasn’t for Nog, maybe he would’ve gotten away with it. But given how far the man was willing to go, it’s hard to accept he’d settle for a “maybe.”

Then again, you could say that the admiral wanted to get caught, not because he wanted someone to stop him, but because he didn’t think his actions were in any way wrong. Nitpicking about slightly over-convenient plot twists doesn’t take away from the fact that this is a powerful, grim continuation of the Dominion War arc, a worthy conclusion to last week’s cliffhanger, and a chance once again to

see how Sisko handles himself in a crisis. And one of the reasons it's so good is that the script makes sure that every character's point of view is understandable, and even, if you've got enough empathy, sympathetic. Apart from the brief appearance of a cackling Changeling (who comes to Sisko in the form of O'Brien; I love the cruelty of that—"Here's one of your most trusted officers! Next time you see him, I wonder who he'll be?") the villains of "Paradise Lost" are all too human, driven to rash acts by their own fears of a threat they still don't understand. A threat which, in turn, understands those fears all too well.

This is as dark as *Star Trek* really gets, but I wouldn't say it's hopeless. Sisko does manage to set things somewhat right again in the end. A truly dark show would have Leyton be corrupt—he wouldn't just be angling for more power because he wanted to protect Earth, he's also be ambitious and greedy and monomaniacal. While it's certainly possible to draw some unflattering conclusions from the soon-to-be-ex admiral's behavior (like the fact that his stubborn refusal to listen to Sisko gets people killed), both his response to Sisko's charges, and Sisko's own internal struggle at turning on his co-workers and friends, keeps Leyton from being a monster. The real message of all of this was that crises bring out extreme reactions in people, and forcing people into situations where they feel they have to make bold, potentially dangerous choices to protect themselves and the things they care about. The more uncertain the threat, the wider ranging the variety of responses, and the harder it becomes to say, "No, this is going too far," because how do you know? "Paradise Lost" takes a definite stand on the security measures initiated in last week's episode; the admiral and his crew have created a false panic to force the president into granting them greater control, which makes it hard to argue that the martial law order was justified or particularly effective. But it's still possible to follow the train of reasoning that led to this moment, and I'd argue that the respect that Sisko (and the script as a whole) still shows Leyton at the end is why I don't think this is a cynical, or needlessly pessimistic, series. Optimism is wonderful, but in order for our ideals to have any weight or value, we have to acknowledge the cost of maintaining them. To pretend everything will work out in the end simply because everyone wants it to is almost as bad as pretending we're all fucked so why bother caring?

There's a sense of anti-climax that runs throughout the episode, which isn't rare in the second half of two-parters; what makes it work here is that the lack of proper explosion after all the build-up last week is worked into the story's structural intentions. "Homefront" was all about raising our expectations for the coming fight, for the chance to finally see the true Changeling threat in all its glory, which meant the audience was anticipating the same thing Sisko and the others were. Ever since we first learned of the Founders, that shoe has been waiting to drop; each successive appearance by a shapeshifter or Jem'Hadar squadron promises potential doom, but it's never immediately. Which makes sense, from the writers' perspective. Depicting a constant, on-going war would change the nature of the show significantly, and if the planning didn't go well, could put them in a box they couldn't really get out of. But instead of making the series seem stagnate or stalling, it fits in neatly with the real design of the Changeling assault: death by attrition.

You can see this in the conversation between Sisko and the fake O'Brien, halfway through the episode. (Time approximate.) At first, the exchange seems like the weakest of authorial contrivances; after the

shock of O'Brien's appearance wears off, it's easy to see this as just a cheesy excuse for the bad guys to get one last gloat in, to provide some exposition about their real plans before giggling off into the shadows. Yet this is exactly how the Changelings operate. Fake O'Brien doesn't give up any key data: he tells Sisko there are possibly as few as four shapeshifters on the planet (not counting Odo), but there's no way to verify this, and no reason for Sisko to trust him. And trusting him would just make it worse—as the Changeling points out, look how much they've accomplished with so few. Look how far their reach spreads, even before they stretch out their arms. The danger isn't the brutal, mindless determination of the Borg, or the proud warrior Klingons, or the cunning Romulans. The Founders have their fighting force, but that force is as much valuable for the power it represents as it is in actual fact. This enemy looks to win by wearing away the foundations of whatever defines the cultures they wish to destroy. The war is not a war of combat. It's a war of confidence. And if that doesn't seem painfully relevant to us now, you haven't been paying attention.

Everything works out okay for now, thankfully. Oh sure, the people who died on the *Lakota* and the *Defiant* aren't coming back, but at least Leyton doesn't get to carry out his plan and depose the president. (I say this episode is anticlimactic by design, but the writers are smart enough to throw in a space battle near the end, just to give us some action.) I love how much it pains Sisko to turn on his former commanding officer, and I love that he shares that pain with Odo; the constable doesn't mention it, but I'm guessing he has some idea what it feels like to do the right thing by betraying the ones you dearly wish you could trust. But Sisko does the right thing in the end, because of course he does, and Leyton stands down, and the lights come back on. (Actually, they come back earlier in the hour, but I thought that sounded cool.) There are still some questions, though. Like how Leyton was able to fake that Sisko was a Changeling in order to arrest him under false charges. Or the bomb that started this whole mess—the explosion that seemed to be Changeling initiated, and yet happened at the same time as the wormhole openings and closings that Leyton initiated in order to raise the specter of a cloaked Jem'Hadar fleet. The biggest question being, what's going to happen next? Sisko's noble ideals are all very well and good, but the enemy is still out there. Even if the Federation doesn't destroy itself, there are others who'll be more than happy to do the job.

Stray observations:

- President Jaresh-Inyo's makeup design is impressive, but it doesn't quite work for me; his face seems to have handles. He does look a bit like a Dr. Seuss character come to life, though, which I like.
- I wonder how the academy is going to feel for poor Nog; in spite of all his efforts to fit in, he's now a snitch. Sisko didn't give him much choice in the matter, either. (Sisko does not mess around when he wants information.)
- A nice exchange between Joe Sisko and Odo about Benjamin: "Is he always such a mother hen?" "He means well." I like the subtle connection between Sisko's need to make sure his father's healthy, set against Leyton's need to protect Earth; obviously the stakes are vastly different, but Sisko shows what kind of man he is by realizing he can't force someone to protect themselves.

“Crossfire” (season 4, episode 12; originally aired 1/29/1996)

In which you can't always get what you want, and getting what you need is probably out of the question too...

That, right there, is an incredibly generic episode title. It's practically meaningless; there's a suggestion of potential violence, and of someone getting caught in the violence, but apart from that, it has no poetry, no intrigue, no real excitement. “Crossfire” is an instantly forgettable name which does not in any way warn you of the hour to come. Although really, when you boil this one down to concrete events, what's there to warn about? Kira's old comrade Shakaar (First Minister Shakaar now, thank you very much) comes to the station. Someone tries to kill him, and fails; Worf catches the bad guy. Kira and Shakaar embark on a romantic relationship. Odo's heart is broken. Quark complains about some noise.

This one's a killer, though, and while I knew Odo's miseries would be front and center, the slow, patient way the story keeps forcing him into the worst possible situations is painful to watch, in the sort of way great storytelling can hurt you when it becomes all too familiar. Which isn't to say that I feel I have some sort of personal connection with Odo's unrequited love; the genius of “Crossfire” (gah, that title) is how it manages to make a specific case easy to understand and relate to. Few of us have been a member of an alien race, self-exiled into a life where no one can entirely understand your needs or even your physiology, connecting to the one person who gives your life some sense of purpose beyond blunt survival, only to see her leave you time and again, worrying each time that this may be the last. (At least, I hope few of us have been this.) But unless you've been incredibly lucky, you've loved and lost before, or loved and never had, or really wanted a puppy but your stupid landlord forbids it because he's just a big old jerk. The point being: Odo's situation is specific, but his condition is universal. It's more than just loving and being unable to say it. He wants life to stay a certain way, because even though it's not ideal, it's as close as he can imagine things ever getting to perfect. He doesn't want anything to change, but change is in the nature of things.

The heartache is the more accessible emotion, but I think I relate more to that yearning for permanence; to have something to hold onto and never worry it might let you go. There's a funny, stiffly charming scene between Odo and Worf fairly early into the episode where the two bond over their shared irritation at unexpected guests and DS9's general chaos and lack of proper discipline. The exchange is played for laughs, although not broad ones; the routine Odo describes (with Worf gruffly approving of each step) is a bit on the stringent side, and their mutual dislike of “friends” stopping by their rooms is worth a chuckle when you realize O'Brien (Worf's apparent nemesis in the “Leave Me The Hell Alone” game) would probably take this as a challenge. But it's a fine way to show the shapeshifter and the Klingon becoming, if not friends, then at least not openly antagonistic colleagues. It also points to the dilemma at the heart of the episode for poor Odo, although Kira's name is never really mentioned. He resists the thought of anything new, of any disruptions in his carefully ordered world, but his undeniable feelings for the major present an irresistible force. Either he tells Kira his feelings, or he lets her go. Neither of these options is ideal: one risks the chance of heartbreak and

losing a friendship he values over all others; the other means intentionally and deliberately cutting himself off from the greatest joy in his life.

The worst part is, the longer he waits, the greater the chance that the choice will be made for him. Which is what happens in “Crossfire.” Shakaar shows up, and almost immediately starts making googly eyes at Kira. You can’t imagine this comes as a complete surprise for Odo; Shakaar is more dynamic than Vedek Bareil, but he’s got the same Lands’ End-catalog good looks, the raspy voice, and the two have known each other for years. But while he managed to get through the Bareil period, we have the Dominion War to contend with now. Odo is cast out from his own people, first by choice, and then because he killed another Changeling. So the stakes for his connection to Kira are higher, and it’s all the more painful to lose her again. And the episode keeps going out of its way to rub that pain in. First, he’s in charge of Shakaar’s security detail, which means he gets to follow behind as the first minister and Kira start to take romantic walks together. Then Kira shows up late to one of their morning meetings, having already had some raktajino (which Odo specially prepared for her) with Shakaar. And then, dear God, Shakaar takes Odo aside and explains how he’s fallen for Nerys, and could the shapeshifter maybe give him some advice, or put in a good word, or I don’t know, lay over and die maybe?

It’s all kind of agonizing and, let’s be honest, more than a little high school. I’m not entirely sure I buy Shakaar turning to Odo, of all the beings on the station, to pour out his heart. It’s just too perfectly awful, in a convenient sort of way; it makes sense that most people on DS9 wouldn’t consider Odo capable of romance, but he’s also not someone who suggests the sort of open, compassionate nature you want in a confidante. Still, there’s a harsh satisfaction about the way this plays out, because when your world starts falling apart, there’s usually an almost blackly comical thoroughness to the collapse. It’s not just that Kira is falling for another man, it’s that Odo has to get his nose rubbed in it every step of the way. And that’s necessary in order to justify the closest we’ve ever come (outside the torture scene in [“The Die Is Cast”](#)) to seeing Odo have a nervous breakdown. It affects his work; when he’s distracted by Kira and Shakaar’s flirting in the turbolift, he misses a security clearance, allowing the fanatic targeting the minister (another Cardassian True Way advocate) to sabotage the lift, nearly killing everyone inside. Then he snaps, and goes on a rampage inside his quarters; you know, the place where he stresses order and continuity above all things. Quark comes up to see what the problem is, and we’re reminded once again of how great their friendship is—it may not be the most comforting thought in the world for Odo to know that the creature on the station who understands him best is also his chief antagonist, but at least there’s someone. Apart from Lwaxana Troi, no one else on DS9 seems to have ever considered that Odo might be capable of emotions more complicated and passionate than “Don’t do that” and “I’m watching you.” Quark isn’t the most comforting figure in the universe, but there’s a practicality to their relationship that will always make sense. Odo will keep on trying to catch him in the act, and Quark will keep on trying to get away with as much as he can, and that directness is what allows them to be friends, even if neither would be entirely comfortable admitting it. Everyone else keeps their motives hidden. Quark and Odo know everything there is to know about each other.

Even with Quark's sympathies, Odo still has to make that choice. And that is what really gets to me, I think. I've always been a sucker for this kind of romance story, but the older I get, the less the romance seems as important as that horrible, awful feeling of something slipping away from you no matter what you do. Because that, really, is the tragedy. Maybe Odo and Kira might form a relationship; maybe they won't. Maybe someone new will come into his life, maybe they won't. But those morning meetings have to end. Odo can't keep pretending he's just friends, and if he tries, sooner or later, the truth will come out, and it will come out in the worst possible way. Odo's quest to maintain consistency, to fight back the frenetic pulse of life just beyond his door, is doomed. It always was. And whether it's Kira and Shakaar, or Kira and someone else, or simply time moving on, every happy moment is one that's already slipping away.

Moving away from dorm-room philosophy (what is it about this show that makes me so mooney?), Odo decides not to share his feelings with Kira, and it's about as sad and dignified as you could expect. I don't know if it's the right decision. On the one hand, Kira has started seeing Shakaar, and seems spectacularly happy about it. On the other hand, their relationship is in the early stages, so it's not like he'd be breaking up a marriage or anything. But it's definitely the decision that makes the most sense for the character, because it's the one that involves the least risk, and the least change. He cancels the morning meetings; his decision to do what he can to let this go. It's a noble act, although there's a sort of violence in it too, both to himself and to Kira. When you care about someone, and they don't know it, sometimes, you want to hurt them, if only to prove you can make them feel even the tiniest shred of what you're going through. So Odo pushes her away, politely, and he loses the belt she told him she liked. When she asks about it, he says, "I'm just trying to keep to the essentials, major."

Stray observations:

- Sad as all this is, the episode does end on a high note, with Odo getting soundproofing installed in his apartment so Quark won't have to deal with the noise anymore.
- It's hard to describe, but there's a bit when Quark points to his ears and says, "Hello?" that made me laugh pretty hard.
- "I'm so glad you're the first person to know."—Kira to Odo, unintentionally twisting the knife. (And it's impossible to blame Kira for any of this. It's not like Odo has done much dating, or ever given any sign of his feelings.)
- René Auberjonois is terrific throughout. At times, it's like watching a puppy get kicked in the face over and over, but he keeps things grounded.

Next week: Dukat struggles to achieve a "Return To Grace," and Tony Todd returns in "Son Of Mogh."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Return To Grace”/“Sons Of Mogh”[Zack Handlen](#)[2/07/13 10:00AM](#)**“Return To Grace” (season four, episode 13; originally aired 2/5/1996)***In which Kira is getting too old for this shit...*

One of the best parts of serialization on a long-running TV show is the way it can suggest other series inside of itself as time goes on. On *Deep Space Nine*, we have our main characters, and we know more or less what they’re up to with each passing season. Sisko is a captain, and he’s running the station, and he’s worried about the Klingons and the Dominion War. Bashir runs the infirmary, Odo is the loneliest constable, Worf is uncomfortable, Dax plays with people’s minds, O’Brien is, well, O’Brien. And so on—the point is, this is the main ensemble’s story, and individual episodes tend to focus on one or more of them, which is how TV works. What’s unexpected is when a recurring character drops by, and you suddenly realize that shit has been going down for them the whole time, and we just didn’t know it. Those changes are less noticeable when it’s someone like, say, Garak, who has a past, but these days spends most of his life on the station, having lunch with Bashir and cutting clothes. But when Gul Dukat pops up near the start of “Return To Grace,” and we learn he’s been demoted and divorced after the events of [“Indiscretion,”](#) that’s unexpected. In the previous episode, Kira persuaded Dukat not to kill his half-Bajoran daughter, even if that meant his political and personal ruination. Well, he didn’t, and it did, and he’s not too happy about it.

Dukat’s arc on the series thus far is strong enough to have carried its own show, and we’ve only seen segments of it. Imagine it in the mold of one of those antihero narratives that are so popular of late: A proud military man who believes the subjugation of another people by his own is only just, slowly but surely getting his face ground in the idea that there’s no such thing as a “superior” race. The effort he

has to expend to maintain power in the face of shifting realities, as first his position is eliminated, and then the very government he's given his life serving is overthrown. And then he comes face to face with a symbol of his own compromised past, and, unable to destroy that evidence, he loses everything. Now, just as his people find themselves weak, adrift, and teetering on destruction, he himself is reduced to his lowest point, determined to fight his way back to prominence, but stymied by a developing conscience and a lack of options. That's where this episode kicks off, but it had me looking back, and you know, I'd love to watch a TV show with that kind of through line. Especially one starring Marc Alaimo, whose ability to make Dukat charismatic, slimy, and yet weirdly sympathetic has helped make the character one of the best villains in *Trek* history. While Sisko and the others are doing their thing, Dukat has watched his world crumble, and all we get are snapshots.

"Return To Grace" finds Kira once again forced to team up with her longtime nemesis, first as a passenger aboard Dukat's new freighter (well, new to Dukat; he's been demoted to busywork post-Tora), then as his co-captain as the two work together to track down a Klingon ship that destroyed a proposed peace conference between Bajorans and Cardassians. Kira also runs into Tora, who's living aboard the ship with her father; while he's lost everything else, his long-lost daughter is determined to stand by him whatever the cost. This is mitigated somewhat by the fact that she doesn't have a choice, as her Cardassian/Bajoran parentage makes her an outcast in both societies. But as with "Indiscretion," Tora helps to humanize (well, you know what I mean) Dukat, especially in Kira's eyes. While it's hard to imagine the major ever truly liking her former enemy, or even getting much beyond tolerating his presence, Tora is at least a reminder that there is some sincerity behind all that unctuous charm. Cyia Batten once again brings an almost uncomfortable directness to the role, and her presence helps to make Dukat's big speech at the end of the hour ring true. He is a man of some convictions, if you know where to dig.

While "Indiscretion" serves as a starting point for much of the character work in "Return To Grace," the latter is the superior episode. Gone are the forced moments of levity, and the attempts to build some kind of unsettling romantic chemistry between the two leads; while Dukat is still trying to pursue Kira, they don't share a laugh together, and while she seems troubled from time to time, it's clear by the end that she's mostly just concerned for Tora, who she sees going down a dark path. The big difference here is balance, and how Dukat's advances are portrayed. It's possible to feel a little sad for how his life has turned out—not to the point of serious pity, mind you, and it'd be hard to argue that he doesn't deserve most of what he's wrought so far. Saving Ziyal and bringing her back to Cardassia was the right thing to do, but when "not killing my daughter" is the highest mark on your list of good deeds, you aren't exactly a hero. This episode gets that balance; Dukat love for his child and his desire to save his people are sincere, but that doesn't mean his sleazy efforts to undermine Kira's love life are somehow legitimate or welcome. They play like the kind of asshole behavior of a business executive who thinks he can get whatever he wants so long as he keeps pushing for it, exploiting the fact that most people won't tell him to fuck off as though that means they're actually welcoming his advances. While I understand the dramatic value of putting Kira and Dukat in confined quarters, it's never going to be my favorite setup for a story, even when the episode (like this one) is quite good. It's

just creepy in a way that's never satisfactorily addressed, that I'm not sure can be addressed. But at least "Return To Grace" makes no question about the selfishness of Dukat's attraction.

As for the rest of the episode, the novelty of having Klingons as villains (or at least a dangerous threat) still hasn't quite worn off for me, and there's some old school fun to be had in Kira's plan to turn the freighter (whose in-ship weapon's system is so weak it can't even dent the Bird of Prey's hull) into a formidable killing machine. The major is once again called upon to put her freedom-fighting past to good use, reminding Dukat he needs to think more like a terrorist if he wants to win. (A loaded statement, but a true one in this case.) The fight against the Klingons is thrilling and fairly clever, but the real kicker of the hour comes at the end, after Dukat gets his great triumph. Ever since he realized he could potentially destroy the ship that murdered so many ambassadors, Dukat had been gloating about his return to power; only to find that once he's succeeded in capturing the enemy vessel, his superiors order him to stand down. He'll be given back his military position, but the Cardassian government wants peace with the Klingons, not war, even though the Klingon ship has detailed records and codes that would give the Cardassians a much needed edge.

The title of this episode, "Return To Grace," is a little ambiguous; while it's obvious Dukat is the one doing the returning, it's hard to say if the "grace" is ironic or serious. After all, he does have a chance to go back to the home that exiled him in all but name, with his former rank restored to him, but he rejects that chance, in favor of starting his own guerrilla assault on the enemy. There's something almost noble in his choice, and the fervor with which he rails against a Cardassia willing to bow down and embrace its own obsolescence. He invites Kira to come with him, and she, of course, refuses (for all his intelligence and cunning, Dukat isn't the best judge of character), but when she offers to take Ziyal onto DS9, to save her a life of running and gunning, he allows it. That says something about what all this hardship has done for Dukat's character. He's still not trustworthy, and he's still capable of unnecessary violence (witness his cool destruction of the entire Klingon crew), but he's a purer character now. Maybe what we're seeing is Cardassian grace: superior intelligence and ruthless efficiency combined in the purpose of utter domination.

Stray observations:

- It's a small touch, but I love how Kira has to get inoculated before going to the conference. The Cardassian health care system is a wreck; how far the mighty have fallen.
- "The best way to survive a knife fight is to never get in one." —Kira, laying down some truths.
- I wonder if we'll see Tora Ziyal on the station again? It's a good setup, actually; most shows, you'd know that Ziyal couldn't stay behind because it would be too much of a change of the status quo, but *DS9* is big enough, and the serialization loose enough, that she can hide until whenever the writers want to use her again. (I also love the idea of the station being a place where misfits and oddities eventually wind up. Although that doesn't work for everyone, as we'll see in the next episode.)

“Sons Of Mogh” (season four, episode 14; originally aired 2/12/1996)*In which Worf loses his brother...*

I’m a soft touch when it comes to Klingon-centric episodes, but even I have to admit that a lot of the plots are getting stale; we don’t need more entries featuring a couple of regular cast members going off in search of a mystical Klingon artifact, at least. There’s none of that in “Sons Of Mogh,” and while the hour does focus on Worf and the responsibilities of his culture, it finds a new angle in Worf’s brother, Kurn (Tony Todd, who is, apart from the voice, completely unrecognizable from his appearance in [“The Visitor”](#)). This is Kurn’s first appearance on *DS9*, but while [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#) dealt with the sibling rivalry/bond between the two Klingons, raised apart only to discover one another’s existence long after they were full grown, this episode is more about what Worf owes his family now that he’s taken a stand against Gowron and the empire’s actions. Worf’s idealism and nobility were often contrasted against the hypocrisy and venality of modern Klingon culture, but here, he’s put in a situation where someone he loves deeply has been set adrift by Worf’s actions. However justified and necessary those actions were, Kurn is still a wreck, his honor gone, his house stripped of lands. All he wants now is death. And Worf, at least at first, is willing to oblige.

That’s a twist I didn’t see coming. Reading a brief teaser for the episode (something like, “Kurn comes aboard the station, wanting Worf to help him die in a Klingon ritual”), I assumed that most of the hour would be taken up with Kurn getting angry, Worf struggling to convince him that life could get better, and the whole thing would end with some kind of bittersweet resolution. Which is roughly what happens, only Worf agrees to kill his brother right after their first scene together. And he would’ve succeeded, too, if Dax hadn’t realized what was happening and interrupted them; as it is, Worf still manages to plunge a large knife into Kurn’s chest before Dax breaks in to whisk the fallen Klingon to the infirmary. This is a smart way to play expectation against character; for us non-Klingons, a relative in good physical health demanding we murder them is cause for deliberation, discussion, and delay. For Worf, well, this is a guy who wanted to be put out of his misery when there was a chance he might never walk again. He’s definitely not happy that Kurn wants to die, but he also believes in the customs of his race, and he has some very deep-rooted convictions about honor and responsibility. Whatever his own wishes might be, it’s his duty to help his brother. To not do so would be to deny the foundations of his own character.

Still, he’s maybe a bit hasty here, and this does lead to the least in the ongoing series of “Worf does something stupid, and Sisko and the others have to set straight” mini-stories. Thankfully, unlike *TNG* (which seemed to set aside time each week for Worf to get schooled), *DS9* has been letting Worf get some wins in, like his backgrounded capture of the assassin stalking Shakaar in [“Crossfire.”](#) And his behavior here isn’t simply adherence to (in our eyes barbaric) custom. As Kurn repeatedly points out, the end of the House of Mogh is, for all intents and purposes, Worf’s fault. His refusal to go along with Gowron’s attack on Cardassia led to Kurn’s current impossible situation, and unlike Worf, Kurn has no Starfleet to turn to if he wants meaning in his life. His position is lost, and since he’s become an outcast through no action of his own, there’s no real way for him to get back what was once his. He’s

depressed and angry for completely understandable reasons, and to its credit, the script never undermines or tries to mock his pain. It's a legitimately agonizing problem, and it's only through an improbable (but kind of cool, and heartbreaking) final twist that we're able to find something even remotely approaching a happy ending.

But there's a lot of angst before we get there. (Good angst, too. The well-earned kind.) Sisko isn't happy about Worf's stabbing party, so there's some shouting; to his credit, Worf doesn't try and defend himself. (Dax stands up for him, though. And this after we saw the two of them sparring and debating weapon efficiency in a holosuite earlier. Love is in the air...) But even after admitting his error, he's still got a sad, messed up brother kicking around. Kurn is, of course, angry to find that he's still alive, but instead of turning the episode into a big fight between the two, the focus is more on trying to find some way around Kurn's death wish, giving him some new life to replace the old. This goes as well as you'd expect, but in a nice touch, Worf asks Odo to take Kurn on as part of the security force, and it turns out Kurn is very good at his job; having given his life over to Worf's hands, Kurn believes it's his duty to do whatever's asked of him. It's a passive-aggressive move, done to force Worf to take responsibility as well as to demonstrate just how pointless and wretched Kurn believes his life has become. But he doesn't cheat. He does well as a security officer (Odo even praises him. Odo!), right up until somebody pulls a gun and Kurn lets himself get shot. He survives, but death wishes aren't great for group morale, and Worf is back to square one.

"Sons Of Mogh" has two storylines; this isn't unusual for an episode of television, but they fit together in a clever way. On a trip back to the station, Kira and O'Brien see an explosion in space; a Klingon ship appears soon after and tells him to move long, lest he explode their butts, but the two are understandably curious. Long story short, it turns out the Klingons are mining nearby space in an attempt to cut the station off from the rest of the Bajor. So, obviously our heroes are going to want to take care of that—but to do so, they need the coordinates for the mines; otherwise they'd just have to blunder around and make a note of it whenever anyone blew up. (The mines are cloaked, by the way.) That's where Worf and Kurn come in. It's both a smart idea to tie the two plots together—they are, after all, both about Klingons—and a useful tool to make Kurn's position that much worse. Now, not only is he destitute and honor-less, he's actively working against his own people; and, worst of all, during the mission, he's forced to kill another Klingon to save Worf's life.

This leads to some interesting soul-searching with Worf (which he does with Dax, hint, hint), when he realizes that his inability to see the threat of death in the other warrior's eyes means that he's never going to go back to being a "real" Klingon, no matter how much he might wish otherwise. Worf's journey over the course of *TNG* and *DS9* has dabbled in racial identity (well, species identity), and while it's never really got beyond, "Man, I hope I'm not a wimp because I hang out with humans. Damn, I guess I kind of am," it's a struggle that always made sense. Everyone has to wonder about their legitimacy when they realize they don't fit every parameter from whatever sociological group they identify with, and while neither *Trek* franchise has ever suggested that the Federation is worse than the Klingon Empire, there's an undeniable sadness to what Worf expresses here. There really is no more home for him, not in the way he always imagined there would be.

Which is why the end of the episode is so sad, even if it's the happiest possible outcome for Kurn and Worf's dilemma. Realizing his brother can never be happy as himself, Worf persuades Bashir to permanently alter Kurn's features, as well as erase his memories of the past. Kurn will still know enough to survive, but he'll no longer remember he was a son of Mogh; Worf even manages to find him a new home and a new house to belong to. It's all a little goofy in the details, a one-off sci-fi switch-up that, even though the individual steps make reasonable sense, seems a bit goofy when put all together. (Does plastic surgery in the future leave any sign? Is Kurn going to get a physical someday and find out he used to look like someone else? Not to mention the fact that Bashir can't change DNA.) But it works, because of the emotion behind it. The details don't matter; what matters is that Worf is permanently cutting himself apart from the only Klingon relative he has left. To save his brother, he has to lose him, and it's ridiculous and tragic all at once.

Stray observations:

- “You thought by distracting me with your outfit, you would gain an advantage.”—Worf, walking into a trap.
- Despite their bonding last week, Worf and Odo still have a very professional kind of relationship; when Worf comes to him to ask for a favor, Odo makes sure to point out how hard the request must be, and how he always collections on his debts. One of the things I like about Worf being on *DS9* is that he mixes up the general love-in of the show's main cast. I don't need everyone hating on each other, but it's nice to have a character who doesn't quite fit in with the others.
- “Uglier, that is. [Pause.] Joke.” “I got it.”—Bashir and Worf. It's hard to convey in print, but the delivery is excellent.
- “I have no family.”—Worf. Aw.
- Tony Todd is, as ever, excellent; he makes Kurn seem on edge and crazed without ever losing the very real grievance and pain at the heart of the character.
- Love that last shot of Worf walking away, alone.
- SLIGHT SPOILER: I was sad to see this is Kurn's last appearance on the show. It's the right choice, though.

Next week: Quark has to struggle with the “Bar Association,” and Sisko meets a potential rival in “Accession.”

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Bar Association”/“Accession”[Zack Handlen](#)[2/14/13 10:00AM](#)**“Bar Association” (season four, episode 15; originally aired 2/19/1996)***In which (some of) the workers of DS9 unite...*

It’s funny how relevant *Deep Space Nine* can be, even when it’s telling small, comedic stories like this one. But then, the battle between labor and management is always going to be relevant, because certain basic problems will always arise. The workers want to be treated fairly, to earn a living wage and have time for a life outside of their job; the management wants to maximize profits any way it can. Not to mention the fact that the people in power tend to have wealth, and wealth means political influence, influence that can be used to shape law to favor exploitation. Or the way various dogmas and ideologies can be combined to convince the downtrodden that they deserve their place on the social scale, that they are inferior and weak and greedy just because they want a basic share of dignity. Until we somehow figure out a perfect system (which, well, don’t hold your breath), it’s a conflict that’s never really going to go away. Just seems like it’s been in the news a lot more lately, between attacks on teachers and the attempted destruction of unions. (It makes sense, sadly. When money’s tight, other people’s rights are always the easiest to sacrifice.) A lot of “Bar Association” is played for laughs, but Rom’s quest to do what’s right by himself and his co-workers never is. Because it’s important, then and now and whenever the issue arises.

Remember Leeta? The friendly Bajoran woman who works as a Dabo girl and is apparently dating Bashir? Well, she’s not happy with how Quark has been treating his brother; Rom has some kind of hideous ear infection, but because Quark won’t allow sick time, he has to work until he literally collapses on the job. Leeta, because she’s a nice person, yells at Quark for being so cruel, and Quark,

because he's true blue Ferengi, ignores her. The next day, he tells everyone that due to a drop in customers (caused by a Bajoran month of cleansing), he has to cut their wages by a third. He might bring the wages back up if business improves, but probably not. Rom, who's patiently endured the ear pain and the collapsing, finally snaps, due in no small part to a casual aside from Bashir. The doctor mentioned a union, and Rom latches on to the idea. The only problem is, unions are illegal in Ferengi law. Even openly discussing them is an arrestable offense. (Or worse: something that can get your assets seized and your family fined.)

The biggest weakness of "Bar Association" is that Rom gets what he wants a little too easy. The setup is terrific: Quark's shock over his brother's emerging spine, the workers arguing whether or not they dare to stand up for themselves, the arrival of Brunt and his thugs to take care of the problem, that's all solid. Then Quark gets the crap kicked out of him, and he and Rom make an arrangement that allows Quark to keep (what's left of his) face, and Rom to get what he thinks the bar employees deserve. This isn't terrible, and the final scene between Quark and Rom is quite sweet, but there's a lack of direct conflict that holds the hour back. Once Rom makes up his mind to strike, he does it, and nothing, not even the sight of his brother with a collapsed eye socket, changes his mind. Which is cool: it's good to see Rom being the hero and standing up for himself. But it robs the episode of tension, because you know he'll win in the end. Even Brunt, as loathsome as he is, can't really do much besides spout threats. Oh sure, he has his henchmen beat up Quark, but as scares go, that's firmly in the comical category. Despite O'Brien's story about his distant ancestor, Sean, who was killed for being a strike organizer, there's never any danger here.

Given that this is a Ferengi-centric story, and those tend to focus on the humor, maybe looking for stakes is approaching the hour from the wrong angle. But in the past, the really excellent Quark and Rom episodes have found ways to generate tension without sacrificing humor; in fact, the tension adds to the humor. This story is a little too easy on everyone, apart from Quark, who needed to learn some kind of lesson for being such a jerk. Still, there's no denying it's fun to watch. Leeta is as charming as ever, and any hour of television in which a major character quotes from *The Communist Manifesto* in a wholly positive light wins some points. And while the main plot never gets much beyond an idle, it does lead to an unexpected conclusion. Quark gives in to Rom's demands, provided Rom disband the union, which Rom does; he also quits work at the bar, and takes up a job as an engineer on the station. It's a change that's been a long time coming. As Rom points out, he does better when Quark isn't around, and for all his ambition and goodwill, he doesn't fit neatly into proper Ferengi society. He lacks the necessary killer instinct. (i.e. the lobes) But that doesn't make him useless, and as good as it is to see Quark grant his employees some rights, it's even more satisfying that the perpetually put-upon Rom figures his way out of a career path that was always going to end with him and his brother miserable.

The episode's secondary plotline is another look at Worf's struggles to come to terms with life on DS9; you could argue that the two stories are connected by characters who refuse to compromise themselves despite significant pressure from outsiders to do so. And both Worf and Rom do find their way to a kind of happy ending, albeit in different ways. Once again, Worf is defined by his need for

order, and his unwillingness to accept that the station will ever be as professional and free from disruption as the *Enterprise*. As Odo points out, it's not as if the *Enterprise* was exactly worry-free. It's more that everyone on board the ship was part of a larger organization, one with rules and deadlines and responsibilities. There are Starfleet personnel aboard DS9, but there are also civilians from all over the galaxy. That means there are going to be occasional bad apples, like the thief Worf catches trying to make off with his tooth sharpener. At Worf's previous workplace, this sort of event would be considered an anomaly, so far outside the norm that it almost certainly stemmed from some sort of larger, potentially episode-filling crisis. Now, though, he's told repeatedly that he just has to deal with it. Life is going to be messy, whether he likes it or not.

Well, Worf doesn't like it, and given that DS9 isn't just his office but his home, he needs to find some way to get comfortable. What works about this plot is that Worf isn't being completely unreasonable. Yes, he's stiff and strict about the rules, and that doesn't make him as immediately endearing as the rest of the crew (regardless of what happens between them, it was a smart move to show Dax caring about Worf, because it makes him more likeable), but there's an integrity to him that's admirable. And he's not entirely inflexible either; if Worf simply yelled at everyone for failing him, he'd be a dick, but instead, he does the yelling (or growling), but then comes to his senses, apologizes, and tries to work out what he needs to do to resolve his concerns. In fits and starts, we're getting to see a man at the hard business of self-improvement, step by tortuous step. He's even developing his sense of humor. In the end, he decides to move his quarters on to the *Defiant*; he's clearly fond of the ship, and the isolation and routine it will allow him to maintain means that he can deal with the station's insanity on his own terms. Dax assures him that he'll adapt to DS9 in time. "Perhaps in the end, it will be all of you who have to adapt to me," he says, grinning. It's a funny kind of cheerful threat; sounds like a good Klingon joke to me.

Stray observations:

- Rom asking a woman (in this case Leeta) to grope his ears (he's been—ahem—groping them himself a lot lately) is just as gross as it was the last time they did that gag.
- LeVar Burton directed this episode. Some of the jokes get pushed a little hard, but for the most part, he did a fine job.
- It was great hearing O'Brien explain why he prefers DS9 to the *Enterprise*: all the imperfections give him something to do.
- Not surprisingly, Odo isn't a fan of the union, but Sisko has ordered him not to interfere. I like that; we're clearly supposed to be on Rom's side, but the show doesn't force all the other characters to agree.
- Great moments in editing: they might have cut it just a little too soon, but the jump from O'Brien and Bashir following Worf into the bar, to the three of them standing in a cell while Sisko lectures them, is unexpected and funny.

“Accession” (season four, episode 16; originally aired 2/26/1999)*In which Sisko accepts who he is...*

Whoa, Keiko is pregnant again! Looks like things are going to get a little bit cra-a-a-azy! [Record scratches.]

Okay, so she’s not that pregnant yet, and the news mostly serves to remind O’Brien that life changes, and his imagined idyllic reunion with his daughter and wife will never work out exactly like he planned. (It also leads to one of the funniest jokes I’ve seen on the show yet: Worf helped Keiko give birth to Molly back on the *Enterprise*, and when Quark tells him she’s having a baby, he panics.) The writers’ ability to get at the complexity of married life in just a few short scenes is gratifyingly deft; the moral is basically, “It’s good to have friends,” but it’s delivered so sensibly and honestly that its very simplicity gives the scenes weight. Keiko and Molly come back home from Bajor, and while O’Brien is overjoyed to have them back, there’s a certain awkwardness. Not a marriage-threatening awkwardness; just the inevitable small distances that form between people when they have time to build their own lives. O’Brien is determined to make the most of their time together, but Keiko, realizing the problem, pushes him back toward Bashir. It’s a cute sequence that does well by everyone involved, and fills out “Accession” quite nicely.

What’s odd, though, is that so much happens in the episode’s main storyline it’s a wonder the writers brought in more material. A long-lost Bajoran poet appears out of the wormhole; he declares himself the new Emissary; Sisko gladly steps down the from the job; the new Emissary starts advocating drastic social change; Sisko realizes his mistake; the two visit the Prophets together; the poet goes back to his own time, and Sisko re-assumes his duty. It’s a fairly complex arc, dealing with the challenges of faith, the necessity of responsibility, and giving us another glimpse at the wormhole aliens and their curiously straightforward method of being utterly confounding. The stakes are high, and while the brevity is in some ways beneficial (Sisko’s soul-searching takes place largely off-screen, which means we’re spared weeks of him getting frustrated, shouting at someone for no reason, and then punching his desk), it also means simplifying and shortcutting the way the Emissary’s misreading of the Prophets proves potentially disastrous for his people.

About that misreading: Akorem was last seen over 200 years ago, and in his day, Bajor operated under a strict caste system called the D’Jarras. Under the D’Jarras, a person’s place in life was defined by his or her last name; when the poet hears Kira referred to as “major,” he’s shocked, because “Kira” should mark her as an artist, not a member of the military. What starts as evidence of just how long Akorem has been out of the loop (as well a interesting piece of Bajor trivia) becomes unpleasant when Akorem decides that the main reason the Prophets brought him back was to bring back the castes. With support from the vedeks and Kai Winn (who doesn’t appear in the episode; her name is bad enough), Akorem starts giving speeches about how important it is that everyone know exactly what their place is in the world. Even Kira goes along with it, although it makes her desperately unhappy, and Sisko is left in the unfortunate position of watching a society purposefully try and push itself into the past, and

knowing it's no small way his fault. And if Akorem succeeds in his aims, the Federation will have no choice but to reject Bajor's application.

It's a difficult criticism to pin down, but the ease with which Akorem makes his wishes known, and the speed with which those wishes are followed, doesn't sit quite right. The idea that some Bajorans would be open to, or even willingly embrace, the castes isn't an issue; we've seen evidence of the culture's deep religious roots before, and there will always be people who will except a new old idea, especially if it offers them a certain level of safety and continuity. But apart from Sisko's objections, no one seems to be taking issue with the poet's demands. Even Kira does her best to go along with the idea, working to find a replacement for herself on the station, and struggling through some pretty terrible bits of sculpture. She's not happy about it, but she doesn't ever question going against the new rules. Given the rapidity of the change, and the fact that Akorem offers no real reason for it beyond his own desire to return to what's familiar to him, it's hard to accept that this would go over as quickly and seemingly as smoothly as it does. A vedek kills someone for being "unclean," but we never see the person he kills, nor do we hear any Bajorans objecting to the decision. This makes Bajor look like a bunch of easily led children who need help from an outsider to get their shit together. That's an awkward angle, to say the least. The planet was in a rough spot when the show began, but by now, they've managed to rise above the Cardassians; the Dominion and the Klingons are threats, but without any immediate danger. If the Bajorans were frightened, split, rife with troubles, their acceptance of Akorem's teachings would be easier to swallow. As it is, given how quickly (and how one-sidedly) it all goes down, it comes across less as a disheartening social movement, and more as a moral crisis for Sisko, and Sisko alone, to overcome.

This is a necessary crisis, though, and while I have some misgivings about the premise, I'm glad to see the show grappling with Sisko's role as a religious icon again. After my criticisms of [the pilot](#) (which I don't exactly remember, and am too lazy to look up, but I'm sure they were eloquent and devastating), I've come around on the Prophets, and the Emissary, and what the hell it all means. For one, having a main character on a science fiction show serving double duty as a kind of unwilling mystic is a terrific idea. It doesn't come up a whole lot, but when it does (like Kira trying to deal with her relationship with Sisko in ["Starship Down"](#)), it raises issues that don't often get raised on mainstream television. While some of the execution in "Accession" is clumsy and heavy-handed, there's enough depth for the episode to mostly work. Sisko's role is presented matter of factly. He runs DS9, and every so often, Bajorans will come to him and ask him for a blessing, which he reluctantly, but sincerely, gives. The casualness of that is fascinating. Sisko isn't comfortable with how the Bajorans see him, but he has a sense of duty and honor, and he's not a cruel man; so he tries to give them what they need, while at the same time chafing at the obligation. At some point, he needed to experience some kind of difficulty which would force him to make up his mind once and for all, and that's what "Accession" provides.

Another reason I'm started to dig the Prophets comes from the conversation Sisko and Akorem have with them at the climax of the episode. Again, this happens a little quickly, and a little too easily; after some discussion, Akorem gets to go back to his own time, with no memory of his trip to the present,

which makes still more hash of the past, as Sisko and Kira allude to in the last scene. But the actual conversation, with its usual arrangement of odd tenses and strangely placed articles, is possible to interpret in multiple ways. The more you listen, the more it seems as though the wormhole aliens don't really have any particular desire for Bajor, and are, instead, reflecting Bajor's own desires back on itself. So Akorem is troubled by the future, and he decides that means the Prophets want the past back. Or, even more interestingly, the aliens could somehow be aware of Sisko's complaints, and offer him a potential replacement. Not necessarily to teach him a lesson, but simply because they're intrigued.

Or maybe it is to teach him a lesson, as part of some larger plan. They do keep saying "You are Bajor," and who knows what that means. However you interpret it, it's open to interpretation, and that makes it more dramatically interesting than a more literal, "We're gods, do what we say" approach. In terms of character, the important part of "Accession" happens before Akorem and Sisko go back into the wormhole; the real crux of the matter is Sisko's decision to re-assume his duties. The aliens themselves are fascinating and weird, but the end result isn't really in doubt. That doesn't make it any less enjoyable to see Sisko give one more blessing at the episode's end, and then smile afterwards. It's not easy being the Emissary, but it has its rewards.

Stray observations:

- Worf on learning when Keiko is due to give birth: "Seven months. Unfortunately, I will be away from the station at that time. Far away. Visiting my parents. On Earth." (This is one of those jokes that starts funny, then goes on a bit long, and then gets funny again.)
- Kira asking Sisko to meet with her potential replacement is very well done; both actors are very good at selling the sentiment. "I don't doubt that I can find someone to fill your post, but to replace you?"
- A brief, but useful guest appearance by Kai Opaka, when Sisko suffers something Bashir says is called an "orb shadow."
- When Akorem is returned to his own time, he gets to finish his unfinished poem. Somebody call Dirk Gently.

Next week: Worf violates the "Rules Of Engagement," and O'Brien suffers more "Hard Time."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Rules Of Engagement”/“Hard Time”[Zack Handlen](#)[2/21/13 10:00AM](#)**“Rules Of Engagement” (season four, episode 17; originally aired 4/8/1996)***In which Worf must learn a little something about himself...*

The theme this week: lies that tells us the truth about ourselves. (Hey, isn't that all fiction?) The Klingon Empire tries to frame Worf from the destruction of a civilian Klingon transport ship in the middle of a battle; an alien race arrests O'Brien on charges of espionage, and throws him in a mental jail for 20 years—only, when upon his release, he finds hardly any time at all has passed in the real world. In both cases, no external harm is done. Worf didn't actually kill innocents, and, as far as everyone around him is concerned, O'Brien has only been gone for a couple days. But both these illusions reveal fundamental facts about both men's characters, in not particularly flattering ways. Television shows are often criticized for suggesting changes to the status quo before quickly walking them back; we've all watched episodes in which some major character is supposed to leave forever, but doesn't, or else people confront their feelings but find a reset button before the situation gets too serious. Technically, that's what happens in “Rules Of Engagement” and “Hard Time,” but in each case, the lack of substantial change is built into the premise. For Worf and O'Brien, having to continue on the way things were, despite what they've learned about themselves, is a special kind of hell.

To be fair, Worf deserves some of what he's getting. He starts this week in a cell in Odo's jail, dreaming about dead children and waiting for his hearing to begin later that day. While escorting a medical convoy to a Cardassian outpost, the *Defiant* (with Worf in command) is attacked by two Birds of Prey. The *Defiant* engages the enemy, there's the usual chaos, and when fighting is at its most heated, Worf

orders phaser fire on what turns out be a Klingon transport ship, destroying it and killing everyone on-board. Now the Empire wants Worf extradited to the home world, where he can be tried for his crimes. They have an ulterior motive as well. As Ch’Pok, the prosecutor (a terrific Ron Canada), explains to Sisko, the Empire hopes to leverage some sympathy for their cause by convicting Worf, and by the extension the Federation, of a despicable act of bloodlust. The outcry would allow the Klingons some breathing room to expand their efforts to annex more Cardassian space. In fact, Worf’s crime seems almost designed to generate the most horror—given his race, and his role as an outsider, he’s a perfect suspect, and the idea that he might have let his blood-lust and fury cloud his judgment casts doubt on his honor, and by extension, the honor of Starfleet.

It’s no surprise that all of this turns out to be a ruse. That’s the least interesting part of the episode, really; it’s fun to imagine Odo running between his Klingon contacts asking questions, and satisfying to have the whole mystery come out. (Although the Klingons did make themselves fairly easy to track in this case.) Plus, given the improbability of a transport ship just happening to wander into battle fully cloaked and then de-cloaking at the worst possible moment, as well as the fact the show wasn’t about to give Worf up on something as ignoble as this, some sort of explanation for the events was necessary, and it had to be more than simple bad luck. The whole thing is fishy from the start, too inconvenient for our heroes, and far too convenient for their enemies, but there’s always a minor sigh of frustration when guilt is wiped away this cleanly. Worf didn’t kill anyone who didn’t deserve it, it turns out, so everything’s fine, let’s have a party and move on with our lives.

Except everything *isn’t* fine, and that’s where “Rules Of Engagement” gets interesting. It’s a well-made episode from the start, as the in media res cold open shoves us into events post-catastrophe; the script (Ron Moore is credited with the teleplay, based on a story by David Weddle and Bradley Thompson) cleverly finds ways to fill us in on what happened, primarily through the testimony delivered at Worf’s hearing. Instead of cutting between the witness describing the scene, and the flashback he or she is recalling, the testimony is inserted into the glimpses of the past themselves, meaning that O’Brien might turn to the camera while aboard the *Defiant* to answer one of Ch’Pok’s off-screen questions. It’s a device that’s a little distracting at first, but it’s used well (and we get a decent joke with it from Quark), getting around the usual static of interrogations and helping to hold our attention for information which, to be honest, isn’t always fresh. Ch’Pok builds his case slowly, carefully, but while it’s important for us to see him getting the answers he wants, as pure exposition, there’s a certain superfluity in being reminded that Dax and Worf like to fight in a holosuite, or that Worf is eager to face battle. That’s why the device of commentary-in-flashback is useful; it makes events which are otherwise static more fresh and exciting.

Still, that wouldn’t have much value if the episode didn’t have ambitions beyond simply putting a cast member in the hot spot for an hour before releasing them. Thankfully, it does. Worf is the one literally on trial here, but he’s on figurative trial as well, and while he manages to escape getting sent back to Gowron’s tender mercies, he still can’t avoid the simple fact that Ch’Pok was right. That’s the twist that elevates this episode from a decent courtroom drama to something more complex and affecting: yet another stage in the ongoing story of Worf Being Groomed For Command.

The challenge with trial episodes is making sure the accused is the focus of attention, even while they usually spend most of the hour staring stoically at the back wall. *Deep Space Nine* has failed at this sort of thing before, but “Rules Of Engagement” manages to keep Worf at the center of our attention even when he isn’t speaking. Usually when an opponent (i.e. the bad guy) casts aspersions against the hero, those aspersions are overly harsh, or flat-out untrue. But while Ch’Pok is obviously casting Worf in a more villainous light than he deserves, the idea that our favorite Klingon exile is still smarting at what his righteous choices have cost isn’t too far from the truth. As Worf himself admits in the final scene, he wasn’t eager to kill innocent civilians, but he was hoping to run into a Bird of Prey or two to get some revenge. Ch’Pok obviously realizes this, and is able to use the knowledge to goad Worf into attacking him on the stand. The fact of the matter is, while the situation was improbable and the casualties faked (all the names, including the flight crew, were taken from a Klingon transport that crashed four months ago, which is not the best way to manage a cover-up, but I digress), Worf still ordered the shot. However the case goes, he’s guilty, and he knows it.

This leads to a great final conversation between Sisko and Worf on the *Defiant*. The rest of the crew is throwing a party to celebrate Worf’s acquittal, and Sisko wants Worf in Quark’s, celebrating with the others. Worf, unsurprisingly, does not want to celebrate, and when Sisko asks him why, he explains that he’s still troubled by what happened, even if it wasn’t exactly what it appeared. What I love about this moment is how Sisko shifts from friendly to furious in the space of a second or two, and how that fury is so obviously controlled; the captain was waiting to see if Worf would recognize his mistake, and once Worf does, Sisko gives him the lecture he’s been holding back the whole trial. Worf needs to hear what Sisko tells him, but only if he came to that understanding on his own terms, only if he himself realized his mistake. So Sisko isn’t angry just to be angry. It’s about making sure the lesson lands. That sense of progress, of recognizing failures and working to overcome them, is something this show does very well.

Stray observations:

- Brooks makes an excellent advocate. His sparring with Ch’Pok is a pleasure to watch throughout, especially in their final confrontation. “Tell me, Advocate—isn’t it possible?”
- While their relationship has happened almost entirely in the background, I was disturbed to see Bashir flirting with a Dabo girl who wasn’t Leeta in Quark’s testimony. But it turned out Quark was misremembering, and it was Morn (Morn!), not Julian.
- Ch’Pok makes it clear to Sisko early on that Worf’s guilt isn’t really the issue here. This creates a fascinating dynamic, in that the obvious threat (i.e. will the Klingons win?) is the one that takes all of our initial attention, while Worf’s actual motives only become important as the story goes on. It’s natural to assume that Worf isn’t at fault, because the crime is so heinous, but the script manages to have its cake and eat it too; Worf stays on the station, his character isn’t tarnished, but he’s still at fault. Fun stuff.
- “I’m always suspicious of people who are eager to help a police officer.”—Odo, who is the best
- “Part of being captain is knowing when to smile.”—Sisko, giving hard truths

- “Life is a great deal more complicated in this red uniform.”—Worf, grasping hard truths

“Hard Time” (season four, episode 18; originally aired 4/15/1996)

In which O’Brien comes home...

The lie we tell ourselves is that we can’t be broken; that we’re strong, and that strength somehow matters. Or even if we don’t have what it takes, even if our soft lives and selfishness makes us vulnerable to torture and worse, there are men and women who could endure any torment without losing their humanity. We treat civilization as an unshakable fact, as though decency and kindness and compassion were a kind of constant energy, an unbreakable flow; as though being a good person was a choice made years ago which we never need revisit. But the truth is, we are imperfect. Bones break, and so do spirits, and if there’s one fact we could all stand to internalize, it’s this: everything fails. Apply enough pressure, and the most steadfast heart will skip a beat. It’s not even that difficult. All you need is a basic knowledge of the human condition, and time.

Time is what Miles O’Brien is saddled with in this episode, the latest in the ongoing series of “Dear God, I’m glad I’m not him” storylines. After asking a few too many questions about Argrathi technology, O’Brien is arrested and convicted of espionage; before anyone can arrive to rescue him, he’s already served his sentence. The Argrathi have a marvelous piece of tech that allows them to simulate the passage of years in a subject’s mind, even while only moments pass in reality. So the Chief serves a 20-year sentence, locked in a cell, starved half to death, growing some really frightening Santa hair, but upon release, he finds Kira sitting next him, not aged a day, trying to explain. All of this happens in the cold open, more or less. We learn details about O’Brien’s supposed crime later, but they aren’t really important. Unlike Worf, questions of guilt or innocence are irrelevant. (Well, at least in regard to the specific charges the Argrathi used to justify the punishment.) What matters is that O’Brien has been away for what seems like to him a very long time; Bashir can’t clear these new memories away; and now the Chief has to re-integrate back into his “old” life. It doesn’t go smoothly.

This is a terrific episode, serving as both a dark companion piece to [“The Inner Light,”](#) and a more subtle, but still effective way to deal with issues raised in [“Chain Of Command, Part 2.”](#) But even before you get to the meat of what makes it so affecting, you have to marvel at its structure. The script (by Robert Hewitt Wolfe, from a story by Daniel Keys Moran and Lynn Barker) doesn’t give us any more information than what we need to know to establish O’Brien’s suffering. We don’t know anything about Argrathi culture—so far as I can tell, it’s a race that’s never been mentioned before, and will never be mentioned again. We don’t know exactly how they accomplished this implantation; we just know that, according to Bashir, the experience is designed in such a way as to be impossible to remove without erasing O’Brien’s entire brain. We don’t even know much about the process itself. Did O’Brien know the sentence would only be in his head? I’m guessing no, but I don’t think he confirms either way. How specific was the program tailored to his psychological make-up? And, in purely speculative terms, what effect would a device like this have on a culture at large? Is this punishment

more or less humane than actual jail time? (I'm also imagining there must be Argrathi who use more positive versions of the device to extend their lives considerably.)

That's all fun to think about, but in context of the episode, what really matters are the difficulties O'Brien faces in trying to return to his job and his family, and the secret of what really happened in all that time inside his head. Both of these threads are compelling, and both show what happens when *DS9* decides to become truly dark, taking one of its most dependable, loveable characters (is there anyone on-board more good-natured, straightforward, and even-tempered than O'Brien? Morn, maybe, but he never has lines) and putting him through the ringer until what comes out the other end is barely recognizable. And while we understand intellectually the scope of O'Brien's experience, it's difficult to relate to in a way that only enhances the tension. We don't know what he's capable of now, and we don't know exactly what happened during his time in prison. He tells Julian that he was alone in his cell, but in his flashbacks, we see he has a cellmate: Ee'Char (played by Craig Wasson, who you might remember as the schmuck "hero" of *Body Double*; he's quite good in this), a patient, warm, and seemingly unflappable prisoner who teaches O'Brien the ropes of stashing food and keeping himself sane via sand-drawing. Ee'Char is so clearly kind and decent that you wonder why O'Brien is keeping him secret. You wonder who betrayed whom. And while that's going on, in the present, O'Brien is snapping at his co-workers, fighting with his best friend, and yelling at his daughter.

That last part is the hardest to take. By now, we've been conditioned by various grim dramas to know what child abuse looks like on screen, but the way O'Brien stands up shouting at Molly, and for half a second you think he might hit her, is still shocking. There has never been an indication that O'Brien had ever even considered violence against his daughter or his wife. We've barely seen him show his temper. He's been irritated, yes, and often frustrated, but irrational, out-of-control fury is a new look, and it doesn't suit him. What makes it even more effective is that, for all the cynicism *DS9* has entertained in the past, it's never questioned the fundamental warmth of its ensemble. Even Quark will only go so far, even he has a heart under all that greed. And yet here is a good man suddenly twisted and hateful almost beyond recognition. I realize I've overused the word "dark" in these reviews (it's far too easy for me to riff off of some imaginary, assumed fan criticism), but this is *dark*. This is sad and tragic and fucked up, and the worst part is, it begins where most stories end: O'Brien is rescued from danger at the start of the episode. The crisis is seemingly in the past. Yet things keep getting worse.

And they have to get even worse than that before they'll improve. As if the Molly incident wasn't harsh enough, O'Brien, realizing how far he's sunk, goes into one of the store rooms, wrecks up the place, and then points a phaser at his throat on maximum setting. Have we seen a *Star Trek* character without a terminal illness threaten suicide before? (Apart from [Worf and his broken back](#)?) It's the sort of thing that wouldn't be completely out of place on the original series, where everyone on the *Enterprise* was always getting up to desperate shenanigans, but not on *DS9*. Bashir stops him just in time, but the idea that things had gotten so far out of hand, that someone who hadn't done anything wrong, and who had always been as strong and reliable as anybody, could be driven to such an awful place, is deeply upsetting. But it's upsetting for an important reason, the reason that makes this hour

more than just another sci-fi brain trip. There is a fundamental truth in all of this that we don't often see in fiction.

Pushed beyond endurance, haunted by the ghost of his former cellmate, O'Brien finally tells Bashir the truth. He said he was alone, but he was only alone for the last week or two of his sentence; until then, he had Ee'Char. And Ee'Char kept him sane, mostly, and Ee'Char was always supportive and thoughtful and good. Until the food started to run out, and O'Brien saw his friend going for a secret stash; thinking Ee'Char was betraying him, O'Brien snapped and killed his cellmate. Then he discovered that Ee'Char had actually saved up enough food for both of them. O'Brien killed his only friend for no reason.

I've been trying to decide where Ee'Char came from. The one who appears to O'Brien on DS9 is obviously a figment of the Chief's imagination; he says so, and everything he does is designed to help O'Brien on the path to mental health. But the one in the cell? Maybe O'Brien's mind, revolting at the thought of solitary confinement, created a companion. But I don't think so. I think Ee'Char is part of the program specifically designed to break O'Brien. This seems counterintuitive at first, given how helpful and useful this imaginary best friend is, but have you ever spent time without someone who you know is better than you? Not more talented or more attractive, but fundamentally better, more decent, more noble, more giving and helpful. You love them, but the more time you're stuck with them, the more you start to hate, because you can't live up to their standard. You can't be perfect all the time. You can't always say the right thing, you can't maintain perfect composure, and so you start to resent someone who can. Ee'Char is far too perfect to be real, and O'Brien spent two decades in a cell with him. He was incredibly grateful, I'm sure, but the rage must've built over time. And when finally something bad happened, when the program pushed the right buttons and all of O'Brien's goodness was stripped away, that rage came out; and after, all he had was the knowledge that he'd murdered someone who never wished him any harm.

The reason all of this makes me think of "Chain Of Command, Part 2" is because this is just another kind of torture, and as with that earlier episode, the moral is the same: everyone breaks. In the end, O'Brien makes his confession and Bashir absolves him, and points out that 20 years is a long damn time to exist under anyone's complete control. Because this is a TV show, O'Brien will be back next week, and he'll be basically fine, and that's okay. The final scene of him coming back home, and his daughter running to him and giving him a hug, helps put us back on even footing; while it might have been more realistic to have the Chief spend the next few years in intensive therapy, living alone and drinking himself to sleep every night, I'd much rather have the softer sell. But the truth remains. Our goodness is a promise we make to the world. It's helpful to remember how fragile that promise can be.

Next week: We go back to the Mirror Universe in "Shattered Mirror," and face the return of Lwaxana Troi in "The Muse." So... yeah.

[Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Shattered Mirror”/“The Muse”](#)[Zack Handlen](#)[2/28/13 10:00AM](#)**“Shattered Mirror” (season four, episode 19; originally aired 4/22/1996)***In which Jake loses his other mother...*

It must be something of a blessing and a curse to get a regular role in a long-running TV series. On the one hand, you’ve got job stability (which would be difficult to undervalue, especially in the creative arts), and there’s something to be said for having time to develop a part and settle into a world. On the other hand, even if you’re blessed with the most talented and ambitious writing staff in the industry, it is still just one role; I imagine even James Gandolfini had moments in the last year or two when he wished Tony Soprano would go far, far away. *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* often has great scripts, and its main ensemble has been given the opportunity to enrich the characters they were hired to play, enough so that I doubt they could have too many complaints here in the mid-point of the run. But still, there are only so many ways Kira or Bashir or Dax can behave and still be consistent, and sometimes, the restrictions that define them must start to chafe on the actors who bring them to life.

Not that the actors’ comfort should be our primary criteria for judging their work, but it’s the best reason I can think of for why the show insists on returning the Mirror Universe again and again, long after any dramatic potential lift in the concept had been wrung dry. The [very first mirror episode](#), back on the original *Star Trek*, was a fun, campy, and somewhat unsettling excuse to see the goody-two shoes Federation rendered in the worst light possible, combined with the creep-factor of familiar faces going balls-to-the-wall evil. (Plus the revelation that, in any universe, Spock is basically Spock.)

The first trip back on *DS9* wasn't nearly as memorable, but it did at least provide a sick punchline to the one brief hope raised at the end of the *TOS* episode. And it was fun to see Nana Visitor doing her weird Joker sex-kitten riff, while all the ensemble we'd already come to care deeply about hunted around for the backs most vulnerable to knives. As a one-off, it was a cute way to pay homage to the franchise's roots, and, I'm sure, a fun writing exercise for the staff.

But it doesn't work as an ongoing saga, in part because every successive visit just reminds us how weird the idea is in the first place. Kirk, Spock, and McCoy were always bumping into ludicrous, blatant symbolic bullshit in the original series, and it worked because that was just how that show was designed; everything was more vital, more immediate, and nobody gave a damn about continuity or science fact. But *DS9* is a more rigorous show, and so the folks on the other side of the mirror have to start developing long-term personalities, and it just doesn't play. Everyone is so cartoony here, from sneering Bashir to pouty, sneering Dax; O'Brien comes across relatively unscathed thanks to his essential O'Brien-ness, and Kira and Worf are both clearly enjoying the chance to let loose, but as entertaining as they are, there's no real dramatic frisson to anything that happens. We don't care about most of these people because their only reason to exist is to remind us of the characters we're actually invested in, and because the show's version of the Mirror Universe resolutely refuses any serious connection between the parallel selves, this teaches us next to nothing about the "real world" ensemble. So there's a version of Bashir who's a dick. He's not developed enough to stand on his own, and he's not really a reflection on Julian, because the Mirror-verse Bashir is too generically dickish to be connected to anyone. If it weren't Alexander Siddig in the role, he would be immediately and completely forgettable. As is, there's momentary "Oh right, that guy's different from our doctor," and once that fades, nothing is left.

What's even worse is that the contrast between the universes, the fact which made the original episode so potent, is almost meaningless in this context. There wasn't any question who the good guys were on *TOS*; while that's basically true on *DS9*, the universe of the show is more complex, less interested in good versus bad than in us versus them, when they might also be us, and we might not be who we thought we were. There's really not much charge in seeing an already morally gray setting turned morally gray but slightly meaner. Take Mirror Garak: He seems to be pretty much Garak, although far more obsequious and pathetic than the non-mirror version. (Gosh, it's been too damn long since we've had a good Garak episode.) I suppose the argument could be made that without his exile to Deep Space Nine, Garak would never have grown into the moderately trustworthy, though still deeply conflicted, character we know and love, but there's no real effort made to make that connection land. Really, the only way this would have any meaningful dramatic impact is if the contrasts were underlined, and if some of the regular-world characters came into contact with their mirror-world selves. But since Sisko and Jake are the only ones who cross over to the other side, and since Mirror Sisko is dead, and Mirror Jake never existed, it's a wash.

So, Mirror O'Brien has Jennifer "kidnap" Jake, to force Sisko to help him fix the *Defiant* so they'll be able to defend themselves when the Alliance attacks. And so on. It's passable for what it is, and the episode keeps moving along well enough that it never becomes painful to watch. As for surprises,

well, Mirror Nog turns out to be an irredeemable dick who yells at Jake before helping to free Mirror Kira from her jail cell; since Mirror Kira killed Mirror Quark and Mirror Rom, she left Mirror Nog in charge of the bar, which puts him firmly on her side. Not that this is enough to stop her from killing him, mind you. So that's fun. Michael Dorn clearly relishes the opportunity to go full-Klingon, so that's also fun. And the space battle that closes out the episode is one of the better I've seen on the series; if we're going to have hollow conflicts, at least they can look pretty.

Otherwise, the only hook for the episode is the return of Jennifer, who gets to meet Jake this time, before she dies (again). It's an okay idea, I guess, but apart from underlining the obvious fact that Jake still misses his mom (which, duh), there's no real payoff. Mirror Universe Jennifer isn't an interesting character, and the actress who plays her still isn't great. Jake gets to hang out with a replacement Mom for a while, which gets sort of weird and Oedipal because he keeps calling her by her first name, and then she dies in front of him when Kira tries to shoot Jake. Which, come to think, is a bit of a bummer, and the last scene, with Jake and Sisko embracing next to Jennifer's saintly corpse, doesn't really strike me as earned. Punishing a character for the sake of drama is a time-honored tradition, but letting Jake briefly reconnect with a presence he'd thought lost forever (even if that presence isn't his real mom) before forcing him to relive the most traumatic experience of his life, is a cheap shot, used mostly to give "Shattered Mirror" the illusion of depth. Cirroc Lofton and Avery Brooks give it their best, but it still plays as manipulative and shallow, and best forgotten quickly.

Stray observations:

- The episode is almost worth it for Sisko's line introducing Jake to Jennifer: "This is the woman—the one I told you about. The one I met in a parallel universe." Oh, her.
- The fact that Jennifer just pops in for a visit destroys what little mystique the Mirror Universe retained. It should be at least a slightly big deal for people to pass between places; otherwise, you have to wonder why the "good guys" on the other side aren't just moving en masse to the universe where everything hasn't gone completely to shit.
- Apparently, Kira had her phaser set to "Most Dramatic Impact." Nog dies almost instantly, but Jennifer takes hours.
- This Worf/Garak exchange also made me laugh: "Spoken like a Klingon!" "I'm trying!"

"The Muse" (season four, episode 20; originally aired 4/29/1996)

In which Jake is inspired to new heights of penmanship...

Well, it's the last appearance on a *Trek* show of Lwaxana Troi, and thankfully, I don't have to spend the whole review complaining about the character. Overall, Lwaxana has been well-used by *DS9*, and "The Muse" provides a fitting cap to her career in the franchise, letting her exit gracefully in a storyline which makes up in sincerity what it lacks in immediate tension or drama. She shows up pregnant, looking for Odo's help; Odo gives it; and then she leaves. It's all very low-key. A pity, then, that it isn't the episode's only storyline. I'm not sure Lwaxana's struggles with her latest ex-husband over custody

rights would've benefited from more screentime, but at least it wouldn't have been as idiotic as Jake's storyline, which has the burgeoning writer fall into the clutches of a mysterious alien played by Meg Foster. The alien (the muse of the title) stimulates the creative centers of Jake's brain with a lot of pseudo-erotic scalp massage, and then tries to drain him dry as he writes his first novel. Wackiness, thus, ensues.

It's lousy, and immensely silly, although not in a fun way. The whole thing smacks of an early or late [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#) episode, the sort of broad, stupid concept that boils down to "aliens are magic, and we are their playthings." (Actually, that's pretty *TOS* too, although it has that cheesy, curtain-heavy sexiness that *TNG* liked to indulge in from time to time.) The brief glimpse we get of Jake watching for story ideas from above the Promenade is fun, but everything else he does in the episode is goofy as hell, and there's no real point beyond what happens, apart from the always silly suggestion that great art has to have some kind of outside excuse, as opposed to just being the product of a lot of hard work and time. But really, this is all just embarrassing and childish, and if this is the most interesting plot the writers can come up with for Jake's artistic ambitions, they should probably just let him go off to the Penington Academy, lest we get an episode in which his latest short story is accidentally downloaded into one of Quark's holosuites, bringing the characters to life, or something equally lame.

Anyway, there's not much to say about it. In fact, there isn't much to say about "The Muse" in general; the whole thing reeks of a certain creative exhaustion that tends to hit series late in the season. Between this and "Shattered Mirror," it must've been hard for the show's fans, but at least "The Muse" has Odo and Lwaxana hanging around, having fun and being nice to each other. Pairing these two characters together was the smartest Lwaxana-related idea anyone on a *Trek* show ever had; Odo's isolation and loneliness mean that Lwaxana's forceful personality actually do some good, and also allows Majel Barrett to be tender and a little sad, which suits her much better than forced antics. Given that the last time we saw her, she was going through the Betazed version of menopause, it's surprising to find out she can still get pregnant, but hey, aliens and whatnot. The father of the baby, Jeyal, played by Michael Ansara (this time he's not a Klingon, but a Tevnian, which translates to "regressive gender politics and a face like a hammerhead shark"), is determined that the infant, a boy, be raised by men, as is the custom of his people. Lwaxana objects, hence her arrival on the station. You'd think she would've realized Jeyal would come with some baggage, but she didn't believe she could get knocked up either, so she probably assumed it wouldn't be an issue.

Jeyal barely registers, though. The real point of all this is to give Odo and Lwaxana some time together, and the few scenes we get of them hanging out are quite sweet. Odo somehow makes Lwaxana necessary in a way she so often wasn't, and his open, and completely guileless fondness for her makes us like her more in turn. There's a fun scene with the two of them playing hide and seek in Odo's apartment (Lwaxana immediately realizes the giant jungle-gym-like structure in the room is for shape-changing), and it all builds to a wedding without a lot of fuss. Not that Odo is permanently marrying Lwaxana; he just determined that under Tavnian law, the new father has say over what happens to the

baby, supplanting the biological dad. So he and Lwaxana will get hitched, stay together long enough for the marriage to be binding under Tavnian law, and the baby is protected.

The downside being that Jeyal wants to attend the wedding, and if he objects to Odo's sincerity, he can null the arrangement. This presupposes Jeyal is an honorable man, obviously, since if he was truly determined to keep the child for himself, he'd object no matter what Odo said. Really, the only reason the clause is there is so Odo can give a very nice speech about how much Lwaxana means to him. He slightly oversells the case, for obvious reasons, but the sentiment is heartfelt, and reinforces just how nifty this small, heartfelt relationship has been. Lwaxana's limited appearances on *DS9* mean that she never entirely wore out her welcome, and it also means that the connection between her and Odo them always seemed fleeting, a rare moment's peace in two disparate, complicated lives. And, as Lwaxana herself reminds us, she's still legitimately in love with Odo, which means they can never spend too much time together—she would always want something he wasn't prepared (or able) to give.

I'm not sure there's enough here to justify the episode, and "The Muse" is mostly forgettable, lacking a strong center to hold itself together; its pleasures are minor, but they do exist, at least. Neither of this week's entries is utterly without merit, but it does sting a bit to run into them both at once, a speed bump double feature that squanders momentum as we move into the final part of the fourth season. Five episodes left; here's hoping things pick up soon.

Stray observations:

- "The day I met her is the day I stopped being alone." I may have to steal this.
- I like how eager Odo is to help Lwaxana.

Next week: Sisko makes a surprising discovery about a close friend in "For The Cause," and then has to deal with the Jem'Hadar in "To The Death." Promising!

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “For The Cause”/“To The Death”[Zack Handlen](#)[3/07/13 10:00AM](#)**“For The Cause” (season four, episode 21; originally aired 5/6/1996)***In which Eddington takes a powder, among other things...*

I'll be honest: I'd forgotten Eddington existed. He wasn't a bad character—it was good to have a representative of Starfleet protocol on hand to remind us of the station's connections to a world we don't often see, and Ken Marshall's low-key delivery suited the role well. But he wasn't used very often, and after a few dickhead moves, he integrated into DS9's inner workings to such a degree that the writers never bothered to show him again. Until “For The Cause,” which starts (after a brief interlude of Sisko and Kasidy exchanging morning pillow talk; the two do good banter) with Eddington giving a briefing to the main crew about a sudden rise in Maquis attacks in the demilitarized zone. After the meeting is over, Odo and Eddington (who act like the bestest of buds) take Sisko aside and tell him they suspect Kasidy has been smuggling supplies to the Maquis. Which gives us the episode's obvious conflict: our hero, torn between his heart and his duty. While there's never any question which will take precedence, there is ample opportunity for the sort of long-distance stares that Avery Brooks does so well.

Before we get to that, though, there's the episode's lone subplot: the burgeoning friendship between Garak and Ziyal (played for just this episode by Tracy Middendorf). It's fine? I feel like I've been short-changed great Garak storylines this season, and watching him negotiate a potential relationship with his greatest enemy's daughter doesn't really fill the void. There's a fun conversation with Quark about paranoia, Kira is clearly not happy that Garak and Ziyal are friendly with one another, and Garak is

briefly concerned that Ziyal might try to kill him. But because she is a very nice young woman who'd rather enjoy some computer-generated hot rocks and hear about a planet she's never been allowed to spend much time on, the two end the episode in a state of mutual accord. I'm not sure if this is supposed to be a romantic tryst (Quark seems to think so, but he's Quark), and I kind of hope it isn't; Garak is more interesting when his sexuality is ambiguous, and the probable age difference between the two is icky. But we'll see.

Regardless, the Sisko/Kasidy sparring takes up the most of the running time, and it works well. Kasidy has always been something of a mystery, in the way all minor recurring characters tend to be; we know the broad outlines (wordplay!), but the motivations can shift on a dime when the writers decide the character can be better used elsewhere. Kasidy Yates is a perfectly charming woman who transports cargo, likes baseball, and has a fondness for one Benjamin Sisko. Penny Johnson manages to convey a decent impression of an inner life in her few appearances, and the actress's fundamental harshness (far more evident in her work on [24](#)) is put to good use in making sure a potentially sappy relationship has a center, pleasing edge. While she's willing to change her life to be closer to him, Kasidy still has enough clear sense of self that she doesn't come across as a pawn or a fantasy. The affair doesn't bog down the show's main plotlines, and she's yet to wear out her welcome. Plus, she's been around long enough that she's become a kind of accepted quantity, which means it's the perfect time to start shifting things around.

There's never any real question if Kasidy is involved with the Maquis. As soon as Odo and Eddington voice their suspicions (in the cautious, respectful way you do when telling your boss his girlfriend is a spy), it's clear where this is going, and to its credit, the script (by Ron Moore, based on a story by Mark Gehred-O'Connell) doesn't make any real effort to keep things ambiguous. Odo and Eddington wouldn't have brought the information to Sisko unless they were reasonably sure, and even Sisko can't argue with them for very long. After some understandable anger over the idea, the captain falls into a certain weary resignation, as though he himself might have had questions about what his lover was doing out in the stars all this time. (It's telling that the first line of the episode is, "Kasidy Yates, where are you going?") Sisko calls off an inspection of the lady's ship, only to have Worf follow the *Xhosa* in the *Defiant*; Captain Yates heads into the Badlands, where she makes contact with a Maquis vessel and passes along her cargo. It's mostly organic, so at least Sisko can tell himself that she's just been transporting food for the colonies. This time, at least.

All of this is well-handled, with that kind of melancholy tension that all stories of betrayed love exude; we know there's going to be a final break, we just don't know when it will happen, and how bad it will be. All of which serves as terrific misdirection for the episode's biggest twist. When Kasidy goes out for another run, the *Defiant* follows her again, only this time, it's Sisko at the helm. (There's a lovely scene before the ships leave when Sisko finds Kasidy and begs her to drop everything and take a trip with him to Risa. She, of course, refuses without realizing what her refusal really means.) The two ships arrive in the Badlands, and spend five hours waiting for nothing before Sisko and Odo realize the truth. Beaming over to the *Xhosa*, Sisko demands answers, but Kasidy doesn't have them. The whole thing

was a ruse to get the captain off the station, so Eddington and his team could steal the industrial sized replicators that had been intended for Cardassian colonists and deliver them to the Maquis.

It's a great surprise, and well-crafted. Eddington mentions the replicators earlier, and the script goes to some pains to establish their importance. It makes sure we understand why the Maquis would want them, before dropping the subject until the final 10 minutes. The plan works, too, which is always an unexpected pleasure; we don't need our heroes to fail every time (or even most of the time), but letting them get tricked occasionally makes them more vulnerable, while making their opponents appear stronger, all of which adds to those mystical stakes that critics like to go on about so much. Plus, it's immensely entertaining when done well, because it creates the illusion that everything is up for grabs. Having Kasidy working for the Maquis was interesting, but while she was a familiar face, her and Sisko hadn't been together long enough for her criminal behavior to be devastating. With Eddington, there'd been a history, however brief, that established him as a stickler for the rules. A company man, so to speak. Only now, he's turned his back on the Federation, and he is super pissed off about it.

That's where the episode's flaw lies, and it's the kind of flaw that probably couldn't have been avoided and still retained the episode's biggest strength. That terrific moment when Sisko realizes he's been had, and comes back to the station to find Eddington and the replicators gone without a trace, is something I'm not sure I'd want to give up; it caught me completely off guard, and gave a jolt of energy to an otherwise solid, but not spectacular, hour. But in order for that surprise to work as well as it does, Eddington needs to be entirely opaque, and that means the character with the strongest motivation in the story is one we never really get close to. Eddington and Sisko have one final conversation over the viewscreens, in which Eddington rails about the horrors of the Federation while Sisko promises vengeance. It's a good scene, and Eddington's hatred for his former employers is fascinating, and hard to entirely dismiss. It's just, where the hell is this coming from? What happened to changing his mind? How long has he hid this anger? There's a history we're not getting, and it makes the twist seem a trifle hollow in retrospect. When Kasidy returns to the station and allows herself to be arrested because she just can't bear to let Sisko go, it's a little corny, but there's enough feeling between them for the conclusion to have power. This is an end to a story we've been watching, and while it may not be the end, it feels like a continuation of everything that's come before. With Eddington's departure, his time on the show seems like something else: a trick played by expert magicians which is still, at bottom, just a matter of misdirection and mirrors.

Stray observations:

- Slight **SPOILER**: I'm pretty sure Kasidy comes back (I made the mistake of glancing at her Wikipedia page once), but I have no idea about Eddington. Given Sisko's fury over the betrayal, you'd think there'd be some kind of pay-off down the line, but I can also imagine him disappearing, never to be seen again.
- The Kasidy/Sisko banter is really top notch, the kind of low-rent wit couples in love often use to amuse themselves between smooches.

- Eddington shot Kira. Sure, he just stunned her, but screw that guy.
- “You know in some ways, you’re worse than the Borg... You assimilate people, and they don’t even know it.”—Eddington, channeling a bit of Malcolm Reynolds

“To The Death” (season four, episode 22; originally aired 5/13/1996)

In which Sisko has to close a magic door...

The other day I mentioned on Twitter that I’m a sucker for storylines which force enemies to work together to achieve a common goal, and look at what lands on my doorstep this week: “To The Death,” which has Sisko and the others teaming up with a squadron of Jem’Hadar to take down a rogue group of their (the Jem’Hadar’s) race. We see our first Vorta since Eris back at the end of the second season; this time, it’s a male named Weyoun, played by the great Jeffrey Combs. And to satisfy those of us with slightly deeper memories, “To The Death” also works in a reference to [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#), specifically an episode in the second season called [“Contagion.”](#) (Worf helpfully points out the connection, which, to be honest, I would not have caught otherwise. It’s been a few years.) It’s a solid hour which, while lacking the big twists of “For The Cause,” reconnects us with the Dominion War, serving as reminder of just how much danger DS9 and our heroes are still in, and also delivers some rousing action set-pieces.

Of all the races of the Dominion we’ve seen, it seems we know the most about the Jem’Hadar. The Vorta have barely registered beyond their initial appearance; beyond a vague telekinetic ability (which Weyoun never demonstrates) and a supposed mastery of the Jem’Hadar, they remain ill-defined, a people more interesting for when they first appeared than for who they are. The Founders themselves have a bit more of a history, given that Odo is Changeling himself, and we’ve visited their former homeworld, but there’s still more mystery than hard fact about their culture. One of Odo’s tragedies, after all, is that even when he found the place that told him who he was, he couldn’t bring himself to belong there, which means our only possible entry into a closed and paranoid culture has put himself out of the game. The Jem’Hadar, though, are old friends by now. They’ve appeared in at least three episodes before this one, and their culture and ways were the focal point for two of those episodes. Admittedly, there’s something inherently familiar about them, in the same way the Vorta and the Founders seem so strange; anyone who’s read a fair amount of fantasy or science fiction has come across the Warrior Race before. Hell, Klingons have been a staple of Trek for decades, and the Romulans aren’t exactly peace loving folks.

The main difference is that the franchise’s other honor-fixated species are all self-motivated. Nobody tells a Klingon what to do unless he or she isn’t all that attached to their limbs. But the Jem’Hadar have been designed and bred specifically to serve others, which makes their harsh devotion to duty a kind of poignant existentialism; when Omet’iklan (Clarence Williams III, who is excellent) says in his pre-battle pep-talk that the Jem’Hadar are warriors who go into battle to earn the right to their lives, he isn’t fooling around. With the Klingons, as crazy as they can be, it’s possible to still admire their

passion and their courage. With the Jem'Hadar, that admiration comes tinged with horror. A slave race who, on average, live only a few years before their brutal demise, who depend on a regular influx of synthesized drugs to keep sane, would have to develop some sort of system for justifying their existence. Obviously the Founders and the Vorta provided the basis of that system, but I wouldn't be surprised if the Jem'Hadar themselves perfected it, turning enforced obedience into worship, making a virtue of the brutal brevity of their place in the cosmos.

All of this has been apparent before, but here we get a long, clear look at a Jem'Hadar squad which is still operating under Changeling control, seeing first hand how their pride has been twisted into valuing their status as property, and how that pride somehow gives them a power that might one day prove dangerous to their masters. Weyoun is a smarmy, insinuating salesman, arrogantly confident in his control over the squad at his disposal, and yet while Omet and the others appear to need him, they don't act all that reverential in his presence. The Jem'Hadar worship the Founders, but clearly, they aren't all that enamored of their more immediate wardens, and that gives them a curious autonomy. It's a shock at the end of the episode when, having accomplished their main mission, Omet murders Weyoun for questioning his and his men's loyalty. (There are no Jem'Hadar women, by the way. The soldiers are created in vats.) And yet there's an inevitability to it as well. These Jem'Hadar don't obey because they have to. They obey because they believe that obedience makes them strong. They take pride in it. That can be dangerous.

I'm burying the lede a little, in that there is at least one unpleasant surprise in "To The Death": an attack on Deep Space Nine which partially destroys one of the station's main pylons. For a few minutes, it seems like the Dominion War has entered a new, more violent phase, and when Sisko decides to follow the Jem'Hadar squad that did the damage (stealing equipment in the process), it's thrilling to wonder what might happen next. A fleet of warships decloaking outside the wormhole? Will half of the station's staff suddenly reveal themselves to be in league with the Founders? Instead, the damage turns out to be more self-contained, at least for the moment. A rogue Jem'Hadar team has broken away from the Changelings and are working to restore an Iconian gateway, for presumably nefarious purposes. The gateways (and Iconia) were first mentioned on *TNG*, when Picard and the *Enterprise* discovered a planet that was once home to a long dead, incredibly technologically advanced race. The episode wasn't all that great, and the Iconians were more an ill-defined McGuffin than a rich culture waiting to be revisited, but it's a nice, continuity building nod to the older show to use the same device here. And honestly, the gateway in "To The Death" is just as much of a McGuffin as the one in "Contagion." The point isn't whatever plans the soon-to-be-dead rogue Jem'Hadar had for it. The point is seeing how our heroes deal with the problem.

The solution, of course, is that they team up with Weyoun and Omet's group. This leads to the sort of cultural clash one might expect, as the more laissez faire attitudes of Sisko, O'Brien and Dax clash against the Jem'Hadar's rigorous discipline. The main point of contention being that Sisko and the others put some value on their own lives, while Omet and his men do not. So there's some squabbling about one side being soft and selfish, although things don't get really serious until Worf is involved. The Jem'Hadar have a thing about Worf, most likely because he's the crew member closest to living a

kind of life they can understand. That makes him easier for them to hate. There are some harsh words, and eventually, Worf and Toman'torax (Brian Thompson) get into a fight in the mess hall. After Sisko breaks things up, Omet disciplines his soldier by breaking Toman's neck. Sisko, on the other hand, disciplines Worf by confining him to quarters during non-operational hours. This seems to insult Omet (who says that Toman was one of his best), and he swears he'll kill Sisko as soon as the mission is over.

He doesn't, of course; and if you guessed Sisko manages to change his mind by saving the Jem'Hadar's life in battle, have a cookie. The overall plot of the episode isn't hard to predict, but that's not really a bad thing, and there are small surprises throughout that provide ample texture. Weyoun's attempt to bring Odo back "home" is an odd, fascinating little scene, as the Vorta walks the balance between high-pressure sales tactics and obsequiousness. And I didn't see his death coming at all, for reasons I'll get into in the stray observations. In retrospect, the episode's only weakness is a certain smallness of ambition. The aftermath of the attack on DS9 is the most upsetting moment; after that, we quickly discover that the situation is still basically the same as it ever was. The Jem'Hadar responsible were acting on their own initiative, and while they have access to a potentially devastating weapon, that weapon is destroyed by the end of the hour, all neat and tidy as you please. We're no closer to finding out what the Founders really have in store for the Federation. But who knows how many more gateways are out there. Or other things.

Stray observations:

- **SLIGHT, JEFFREY COMBS-RELATED SPOILERS:** Okay, so, I *know* Weyoun is in more than just one episode. I've seen at least part of a later episode with him in it. It surprised the hell out of me to see him get vaporized. I hope he comes back soon. Combs is great; all unctuous charm and weaselly arrogance.
- "I am Chief Miles O'Brien. I'm very much alive, and I intend to stay that way." —O'Brien's war cry
- "How old are you?" "I stop counting at 300." "You don't look it." —Fun exchange between one of the Jem'Hadar and Dax
- Random speculation: Are the Jem'Hadar even capable of physical intercourse? No women isn't necessarily a barrier, but I'm not even sure if these guys have the right equipment. The more we learn about them, they sadder they are.

Next week: Bashir becomes a Highlander in "The Quickening" and things get wacky with "Body Parts."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Quickening”/“Body Parts”[Zack Handlen](#)[3/14/13 10:00AM](#)**“The Quickening”(season four, episode 23; originally aired 5/20/1996)***In which Bashir does what he can, and it’s almost enough...*

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine has featured the Dominion as a major, if somewhat elusive, threat for a couple of seasons now. It’s been a good fit for the show; the mysterious nature of the Founders, the horrifying brutality of the Jem’Hadar, the Vorta smarm (the last of which, admittedly, has been in limited supply) have all served to suggest an opponent with seemingly bottomless resources and astonishing guile, a foe who has been through a hundred conflicts much like this one, and come out on top every time before. The Changelings’ use of fear and paranoia to unman (so to speak) their enemies means that every new problem that arises on Deep Space Nine might in some way lead back to their machinations, and their access to a devoted, vat-grown race of super soldiers means that there’s always a fist to back up all the insinuations, if one is required. But while this has established them as an adversary to be reckoned with, some of the moral framework of the conflict has been lost. I root for Sisko and the others because these are the characters I care about, and because there is something clearly screwed up about staffing your military with drug-addicted slaves. But it’s not like the *Enterprise* never stumbled over objectionable societies before. The Changelings have a history of persecution to back up their choices; what makes them so wrong?

There are multiple answers to this particular question, but “The Quickening” provides the most immediate yet; regardless of their past, the Founders decision to not just conquer but utterly destroy anyone who gets in their way is indefensible. And their methods make it even worse. Returning home

from a routine mission in the Gamma Quadrant, Kira picks up an SOS message from a planet just outside of Dominion space. Bashir and Dax beam down to investigate (in a nice touch which means that at least one person stays on the shuttle in case anything goes wrong), and find a city devastated by a plague known only as “The Blight.” Everyone on the planet is infected with the disease at birth; it starts as lesions on the skin, until at some point, those lesions “quicken” and become a fatal, throbbing red. Death follows soon after. There’s no cure, and the only doctor Bashir can find, a man named Trevean, has resigned himself to offering what little comfort he can: When someone quickens, Trevean helps them arrange a final dinner with their family and friends, and then gives them an herbal poison that will allow them to die quickly and painlessly.

Unsurprisingly, Bashir isn’t a fan of this, and at first, “The Quickening” looks like it will be story about how the good doctor needs to learn the limits of his science and book-learnin’; any time a character becomes obsessed with something, be it a cure to a plague, a white whale, or the name of that band that recorded that song in 1987—no not that one, the other one—a certain amount of perspective will inevitably be applied before the end credits. And that is a part of what happens in “The Quickening.” While the writers have backed away from earlier portrayals of Bashir as an arrogant, callow youth who thinks some time in the back end of civilization will be a bit of a lark, they, along with Alexander Siddig, have turned that mildly irritating stereotype into something richer and more endearing. Bashir’s earlier brashness was simply a side effect of his deep and passionate optimism, a faith in his abilities that isn’t so much ego as it is a need to be able to make things better. So any time he takes center stage, there’s going to be some kind of conflict between that optimism and the grinding ugliness of reality. After all, he went into medicine, not puppy-cuddling; he chose a profession where he’d have to fight death back every day (as he tells Ekorla in this episode), but no matter how good you are at fighting death, you will lose eventually.

But that isn’t the main focus of “The Quickening,” which is less a morality play for its hero than it is a character study, and a look at how a culture can lose hope, and how difficult, terrifying, and occasionally fatal it can be to rebuild that hope. Apart from a line from Dax reminding Bashir that just because he’s angry with himself doesn’t mean he has the right to give up, this is also pretty much judgement free. (I wonder if one of the problems with Dax—who I think is great, but doesn’t get a lot of great episodes like this one focused around her—is that the age and experience of the symbiote means that she’s relegated to playing the voice of wisdom in almost every situation. She doesn’t have obvious flaws or demons she’s struggling with; that makes her a terrific secondary figure, but frustratingly distant as a heroine.) And that’s good. The storyline isn’t shy about playing up the tragedy and ugliness of its situation; there’s a sincerity and directness to the struggles of Ekorla and her people that for the most part eschews subtlety, choosing obvious symbols (Ekorla is pregnant for more than just plot purposes) and putting us through the emotional wringer. I can see this being labeled as melodrama, but I think it works regardless; the cast is strong, but just as importantly there’s the refusal to pass judgement on any of the characters. Everyone here has understandable motives, and none of those motives are given precedence above the others. That’s an immensely rich approach to storytelling: many perspectives, all of them necessary.

While the plague planet suffers from the usual *Trek* Economy of Civilization (in that it's a big planet, but the small piece of it we see is supposedly a stand-in for every possible city/town), and the few characters we get to know are arguably more archetypal than specific individuals, they are convincing enough, and tragic enough, that the distinction isn't really important. Ekorla (Ellen Wheeler), the pregnant woman who asks Bashir for help, could've been the most manipulative cliché imaginable: a young mother alone in the world, desperate to see her baby before she dies. But the actresses' subdued, earnest performance is heartbreaking, and the script (by Naren Shankar) manages to give her just enough personality that even though the trick is obvious—it's hard not to get choked up about someone like this—it works. Little details fill her in, like the fact that her dead husband was a painter (leaving behind a mural that reminds people of what life might be like if they weren't all dying young), or her ease tending to sick patients, so that by the time her quickening strikes, and she's begging Bashir to help her survive long enough to give birth, it's nearly impossible not to be moved by her plight.

Textures like this define the episode, which forgoes some of the more complex morality we've seen in other entries in the series to have a stronger, more direct empathetic effect. Still, there is some minor, but fascinating, conflict at play. Take Trevean. Initially Bashir is upset by the other man's seemingly casual acceptance of the inevitability of death. This isn't a position we're supposed to share; Bashir's stubbornness has been well-established by now, and the people who come to Trevean for help don't seem coerced or indoctrinated, but simply trying to find some dignity in a horrible situation. Yet it's hard to deny that Trevean's acceptance of their plight hasn't helped to make that situation more inevitable. Bashir may have an outsider's blindness to the difficulties and pain of living in a world where you're fatally ill from birth (okay, technically, that's all of us, but you get me), but his perspective allows him to work in an environment where anyone else who might have accomplished something has long since given up. It doesn't hurt that the disease gets worst after prolonged exposure to the electrical fields given off by Bashir's instruments; it's a sickness designed to punish people who try and cure it. So it's completely understandable that Trevean is doing the best he can. But the anger and fear with which people react to Bashir's efforts is fascinating—they've been hurt before, and the worse that hurt gets, the more effectively they are insulated against any potential cure.

Ekorla dies immediately after giving birth. There's a happy ending to this story—the antigen Bashir developed works as a vaccine—but it's not a cure-all: since everyone is born with the plague, the vaccine only works on unborn children. They can save future generations, but not themselves. To be honest, even this is more upbeat than I was expecting, and it's a mark of how well the episode is put together that hope can be found amid such a dire situation, and it doesn't come across as cheap or unearned. (Maybe this also has something to do with my ignorance when it comes to bio-engineered plagues.) But even this isn't enough for Bashir. In the final scene, he's back in his office on DS9, running computer simulations, rubbing his eyes and hoping that maybe the *n*th pairing of the *n*th sequence might yield something he can use, that maybe 10 hours can do what five did not, and if that fails, there's always tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow. This is the cost of wanting to do good:

knowing that you can never do enough, but being unable to keep trying to fix everything, cure everyone, save this world and that world and all of them. It's certainly a kind of arrogance, and the episode makes a point of showing how it has its limits; when his first attempt at a cure ends in multiple deaths without any seeming positive result, Bashir turns his energies inward, and it's only a quick verbal shoulder-shake from Dax that shames him into getting back on his feet. But ultimately, this is who he is, and when Sisko congratulates him for the vaccine, Bashir barely acknowledges the praise. There's still work to be done. And because Ekoris is dead, and because her child will never know his parents, the work will never truly end.

Stray observations:

- I'm a sucker for a good cold-open comedy sketch, and the bit here about Quark reprogramming the replicators and video feeds around the station to advertise his bar is pretty funny, especially Worf's utter rage at getting a singing cup with his prune juice.
- It is almost impossible for me to hear "the quickening" without wanting to laugh. Congratulations, *DS9*. You managed to beat *Highlander 2* out of my brain.
- "I like your spots." "You told me that yesterday." "I still like them."—a patient and Dax
- At one point, Trevean makes vague threats at Bashir about how bad things happen to people who make promises they can't fulfill. I was expecting some kind of major conflict after the first round of deaths, but it's mostly just Bashir feeling like shit about himself. Probably better that way.

"Body Parts" (season four, episode 24; originally aired 6/10/1996)

In which Quark makes a bad bargain...

While I came around to liking "Body Parts" soon enough, it's bad scheduling to put this just after "The Quakening." The episode's main plotline has Quark convinced he's been struck with a fatal disease, and since there's no way in hell the show was going to kill off Quark this suddenly, the plot is played largely for laughs. Oh, it's well done, and it leads to one of my favorite endings the show has ever done, and overall, I think this is a good one; but coming right after all the misery of Ekoris and her people, it seems somehow callous to follow Quark bemoaning his ill health when we all know damn well there'll be some sudden reversal or miracle cure. Maybe people watching the show week-to-week when it originally aired wouldn't have noticed the shift; and if nothing else, it's a good example of how much range *DS9* has even when it's tackling tangentially related topics. But it struck me, if only for a little while.

That out of the way, "Body Parts" isn't all laughs. While Quark is contemplating the end of his life, and how little he has to show for his time spent earning, Keiko and Kira are caught in a shuttlecraft accident that forces Bashir to improvise. Behind the scenes, Nana Visitor had become pregnant (with her and Alexander Siddig's baby, no less), and the writers came up with a work around that would allow Visitor to stay in the show while she was expecting without having to resort to a lot of loose-

fitting clothes, chest-high tables, and from-the-neck-up close-ups. The solution was to put Keiko's baby in Kira's womb when Keiko is injured in the accident; because of the way Bajorans carry their young (Bajoran pregnancies only last five months), once the fetus is in Kira, it's stuck there for the duration.

As a plot device, this is pretty ridiculous, but as a workaround of an unavoidable situation, it's not bad at all; a damn sight better than that awful "Daphne gets fat" crap on *Frasier*. And once the idea gets going, the writers find interesting ways to let it play out, spending most of the time in this episode with Keiko and O'Brien as they struggle to come to terms with missing out on what they both consider a crucial part of the child-rearing process. Keiko is especially heartbroken, and it's hard not to feel for both of them, while still finding their smiles as they welcome Kira into their home a little too welcoming, a little too desperate. There's an awkwardness, a naked emotional need that makes this situation deeply difficult to navigate on both sides, and since there's no conclusion to the arc in this episode, there's no saying where it will go before the actual birth. By the end of this episode, Kira's moving in with the O'Briens and making friends with Molly. The whole idea is still pretty goofy, but it's impressive how well it integrates with one of the most basic of the show's themes: the clumsy, heartfelt ways people build families.

What's even more impressive is that this theme also turns out to be at the heart of the episode's other, more prominent plot: Quark's struggle with mortality and his role as a Ferengi. The struggle with mortality lasts just long enough to set up the second half of the plot. See, now that he thinks he's dying (SPOILER: he's not), Quark needs to find some way to pay off his debts, so he can be assured of his place in the Divine Treasury. He has a lot of debt, but the only asset he can sell is his desiccated corpse, to be vacuum sealed and sliced into 52 discs after his death. Rom assures him that he'll find buyers, but Quark is skeptical; so imagine his shock when someone bids a huge chunk of money for the whole lot of him. It's the sort of happy twist you know is going to quickly turn sour, and it does soon enough. Because Quark isn't dying, his doctor just swapped diagnoses (I like to think the only reason he realized his mistake was when another patient he'd pronounced healthy suddenly died). That's great, except that the person who paid all that money for Quark's corpse is his old friend Brunt (F.C.A.), and he's not going to accept a refund plus interest in exchange. He paid for a dead Quark, and he wants a dead Quark, and he's not all that particular on how.

There's an obvious way this can go. We've seen Brunt (F.C.A.) apply muscle to a problem in the past, so it wouldn't have been all that shocking if he'd tried to do the same thing here, and send some assassins after Quark to get what he considers is his due. But the episode takes the more interesting approach of putting the choice of the matter entirely on Quark's shoulders. Brunt (F.C.A.) makes the situation very clear: either Quark kills himself, or he'll have to break his contract, thus rendering himself persona non grata in the eyes of Ferengi law. It's a choice between his life and his way of life, and Brunt (F.C.A.) has no qualms about making sure Quark understands that the Ferengi way of life is exactly what he believes to be at stake here. Brunt (F.C.A.) didn't buy Quark's body for sentimental reasons, or because he has an idea to make some profit off the corpse. He's doing it because he wants to desecrate Quark's memory as horribly, and as thoroughly, as he can, because he considers Quark to be the symbol of everything that's wrong with Ferengi culture. Just as Quark raged at his mother, his

brother, and his nephew for staking out new ways of living, Quark is now the one being accused of a lack of fidelity to the cause.

This is probably too much weight to be suddenly putting on the shoulders of Brunt (F.C.A.), a character who's only appeared in two other episodes; his attempt to run through a laundry list of Quark's previous misdeeds never really gets off the ground. But Jeffrey Combs is, as ever, game, and he makes the character's loathing utterly believable. Besides, the accusations fit into Quark's character arc on the series in a way that's just coming into focus. Quark has always come across as the square of his family, the one who professes to cling to the old ways, and yet despite his exhortations, there's the core of decency in him that prevents him from ever truly turning his back on the people he cares about. He's like a less brash, better-spoken Archie Bunker: bigoted and often foolish, but not, in the end, an evil creature. The line between progress and staunch conservatism is a difficult one to walk, and Brunt (F.C.A.) and his rage is evidence of just how impossible Quark's position is to sustain. He's too crooked to be a completely accepted member of the Federation, like Rom and Nog will be, but he's too willing to bend his principles for others to be a true old-school Ferengi. So he's stuck. And DS9 is good place for people who are stuck.

There's some amusing business with Quark hiring Garak to assassinate him, and then freaking out when Garak demonstrates what assassination actually entails (they argue over details, but Quark's main bone of contention seems to be that he doesn't want to be dead, which is a pretty reasonable position); Quark has a dream in which Rom appears as Gint, the first Grand Nagus, to convince him to break the contract and save his life. Which, in the end, is what Quark does. It's a strong choice for the show, because there's no pretense of Quark finding some loophole to save himself that will restore the status quo; even if this never comes up again (and I'm sure it will), we'll still know that Quark has been banned from doing business with other Ferengi, that he's chosen compromise over martyrdom, and that changes who he is.

Even better, the writers manage to work in a reference to *It's A Wonderful Life* that manages to be funny, sincere, and convincingly deserved. After Brunt (F.C.A.) closes up Quark's bar and repossesses everything he has (even his shirt!), Quark sits in the place that used to be his only accomplishment in the world and contemplates the emptiness. Rom arrives, offering little comfort as usual, but as they're sitting there talking, Bashir drops off a crate of foul-tasting booze one of his patient's used as payment (which, come to think, wouldn't be necessary, since Bashir is Federation; is he charging on the side?). While Quark is refusing to accept the charity, Dax brings in a box of extremely ugly glasses. And then Sisko and seemingly half the station bring in new furniture, claiming that they're looking for a place to store it. This is the "George Bailey, the richest man in town" climax of the Frank Capra classic, with just enough of a skew to make it believable. And it's surprisingly touching. Quark is often annoying, regularly selfish, and generally a pain in the ass. But he belongs here, and everyone knows it.

Stray observations:

- "You weren't always a tailor." "You're right. I used to be a gardener." —Quark and Garak, exchanging words

- As much criticism as the show throws at the Federation, it's worth noting how the problems in Ferengi civilization (as well as the crazed ups and downs of the Klingon empire) serve as subtle ways of reinforcing how, whatever its flaws, the Federation is still arguably the best way to go. What makes the Ferengi and the Klingons so vulnerable is their monomaniacal adherence to an unsustainable ideal; the more the Ferengi trade with other races, the more likely they'll be exposed to cultures that contradict their own ways; and the more the Klingons try to expand, the greater the odds they will eventually run into someone bigger (or, just as problematic, that they won't be able to hold together their own kingdoms). The Federation, on the other hand, has some rules and regulations to follow, but they're basically peaceful intentions and desire for inclusion mean that, boring and bland or not, they're more flexible.
- I didn't tear up at the ending. But it was close.

Next week: We close out the fourth season with "Broken Link," and I try and come up with something clever to say about the season as a whole.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Broken Link”[Zack Handlen](#)[3/21/13 10:00AM](#)**“Broken Link” (season four, episode 25; originally aired 6/17/1996)***In which Odo has a change of heart...*

You could say be careful what you wish for, but that wouldn't be exactly fair, would it. Because as much as Odo wanted to belong with the solids, I never got the impression that he wanted to be one. Maybe when he was younger; maybe during some of the early years on Deep Space Nine, he might have wished he didn't have to worry about the bucket every night, or that he could eat food like everyone else. But the thing about Odo is, he knows who he is. In order to face a life as a seemingly unique organism, a creature who had to concentrate at all times to fit in with the people around him, Odo developed an ironclad sense of himself, a devotion to order, rules, and discipline. Then he finally found his own people, and the rules became less clear. I don't think the Founders were being intentionally cruel when they encouraged Odo to explore his abilities as a Changeling; they were simply trying to remind him of who they thought he was, and to give him more of a reason to come home. But Odo made his choice, and that choice eventually led to him breaking the one law his people had, and that led to the end of “Broken Link”: Odo is no longer a Changeling. In retrospect, all those speeches about textures and birds and new forms seem cruel. Just as he was getting a sense of his potential, he loses it.

After a season spent mostly in the shadows, the finale finds the Founders machinations once more at center stage when Odo is suddenly struck by a terrible disease. One minute he's in Garak's shop, meeting a Bajoran named Chalan who's is crushing on him hardcore (and quite lovely to boot), the

next he's half-melting and shuddering on the floor. Bashir is baffled; all he can say for sure is that Odo's molecular stability is in flux, and the worse it gets, the more difficult it will be for Odo to stay in his solid form. Eventually, he'll revert back to liquid and stay there, which creates something of a ticking clock for the other characters. And they have their own problems. Gowron has decided to up the ante in Klingon/Federation relations, threatening outright hostilities if the Federation doesn't remove itself from the Archanis system, once disputed territory that the Klingons had supposedly given up a hundred years ago. But that's for the future. Odo's problems are more pressing, and if a solution isn't found soon, he's doomed.

This leads to the expected, though still disturbing, decision that he has to go back to the Founders and beg for a cure. Sisko proposes taking the *Defiant* into the Gamma Quadrant, where they'll send out a message and hope to eventually be picked up by a Jem'Hadar ship; after all, nobody knows where the Founder homeworld is after the Obsidian Order and Romulan attack on their previous planet. A large part of the episode is finding ways to kill time before the Odo returns to the Great Link, but at this point in the show's run, the writers know how to fill in the gaps, and they have enough established character relationships that what otherwise might have looked like padding or basic expository conversations have a certain weight and resonance. Like Kira making sure to check on Odo when he's in the Infirmary, even going against Sisko's wishes to do so, and bringing the constable a report of the day's criminal activities. Given what we know about their relationship, and how much time they've spent together going over their reports, it's a sweet, sad little moment. Likewise, Quark's goodbye Odo when he leaves the station (at this point, poor Odo is half-melting everywhere, a simple makeup effect that nonetheless looks great; it does make you wonder why no one on the station thought to bring a gurney to make the transport easier, but maybe Odo was determined to walk) is well handled. As ever, their mutual antagonism is the closest thing either character really has to a long-term connection, and both of them realize it. Quark's insistence that Odo is coming back is awfully sweet, too.

Then there's Garak, who insists on coming along for the trip because he wants to find out if there were any survivors from the attack on the Founders' homeworld. We've had something of a drought of great Garak stories in recent weeks, and while his arc isn't the main focus of this episode, it does show him in fine, ambiguous form. Well, "ambiguous" isn't quite the right word, as there's no real question what Garak wants by the end of the hour (at least what he wants right now). But he is someone with his own perspective, a perspective which is often at odds with the show's heroes, but one which doesn't make him an outright villain. Here, it's clear he has some fondness for Odo (hence his attempts to set the constable up with Chalan in the cold open), but his main interest is in determining the fate of the Order. When he confronts the Female Shapeshifter (played by Salome Jens; has she ever been given a specific character name? It's the woman Odo met the first time he visited the Founders) he learns there were no survivors from the attack. Worse, the Founders hold grudges; they consider Garak and the entire Cardassian race to be already dead, for the temerity of daring to attack.

It's a quick, verbally brutal scene that pivots well off the Female Shapeshifter's more empathetic (if still stern) exchange with Odo, and it drives Garak out of his mind. Garak unhinged is a rare sight for

the show, and we don't see the real impact of the Shapeshifter's threat on the tailor until Worf finds him in the *Defiant's* engines, working feverishly to hack into the weapons' system so that he can fire all phasers and torpedoes on the planet below. Odo is with the Great Link on the planet's surface, and Sisko and Bashir are waiting for him, but Garak doesn't care; nor does he care that the nearby Jem'Hadar ships will surely attack and destroy the *Defiant*, killing everyone onboard, if Garak succeeds. There's a hard logic to his intentions, belied only slightly by his frenetic behavior—a handful of lives weighed against the potential millions of casualties from an all out war with the Dominion doesn't seem like much of a price to pay. Worf disagrees, and proceeds to kick Garak's ass when the Cardassian refuses to stand down. It's a good fight, claustrophobic and intense, between two sympathetic characters who clearly don't much like each other. (Well, I doubt Worf likes Garak. It can be hard to tell who Garak likes.)

The heart of the hour, though, lies with Odo, and his journey from pariah to (apparently permanent) exile. Interestingly, the most important dramatic transition happens near the end of the episode, giving little time to examine the repercussions. Odo joins the Great Link—a terrific image, so-so 1990s CGI and all, of an island of stone surrounded by a sea of liquid Changeling—where he is judged by his supposed peers, and they decide his sentence: they make him human. He keeps his old face, to remind him of what he lost, but every ounce of metamorphic ability is stripped clean. While it's a shock that the Founders would even be capable of such an action (it's not like we can turn people into horses... yet), the decision makes sense; it's unfortunate that the writers will lose Odo's shape-changing abilities, but in retrospect, those were never all that crucial to the character. His outsider status was what defined him, and now he's even more of an outsider than he was before, an inhuman human, a frozen Shapeshifter, an outcast in any culture. And yet in the episode's last scene he seems almost hopeful, almost accepting. To the Founders, locking a Changeling into a solid's form must be an almost unimaginably harsh sentence; given their closed-off culture and contempt for outsiders, this is akin to an execution, minus the mercy of the blade. But to Odo? We'll have to wait and see what next season has in store. but I think there's hope left. Bucket or no, he's a self-made man.

Stay observations:

- Garak gets six months for that stunt on the *Defiant*. I hadn't even expected him to do time, but it's a smart choice; there have to be some consequences, after all. I wonder if the writers will use this in season five? (Given the cliffhanger ending, I'm doubting there's going to be a time jump.)
- The scene of Kira sneezing, and Dax, Sisko, and Worf trying to guess how many times she'll sneeze before she stops, is pretty adorable. While I realize the plotline was more a matter of behind-the-scenes biology than creative intent, I'm surprised it's stretching over to the next season.
- Sisko allows Garak to come along on the trip to see the Founders so Odo will have someone to distract him with innuendo and conspiracy hints. That's brilliant. (And I love that we actually see a bit of the conversations between Garak and Odo, with Garak delivering on what he promised.)

- All the dudes feel naked without the *Defiant*'s cloaking device on, which amuses Dax to no end.
- “You fight well. For a tailor.” —Worf, finally getting to put the burn on someone.
- Speaking of tailors and nudity, a scene near the end has Garak fitting Odo for his first suit of clothes, right before Odo escorts him to jail. As always, Garak's ability to risk everyone's life in one breath, and sincerely wish Odo happiness in the next, is one of his most likeable qualities, and reminding us of all the things Odo will get to experience now (including, maybe, dating) helps to keep the episode from ending on a completely sour note.
- “My job is the only thing I have left.” Be honest, Odo: that's not much of a status change.
- And, of course, the Gowron reveal. A big shock, and a bold move by the writers. I'm not quite sure yet how I feel about it. On the one hand, I'm glad the show is raising the stakes again; on the other, Gowron has been around since [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#), so how long has he been a Changeling? It's also odd to see a character at the forefront of the action revealed to be an impostor; up until now, the Changelings had been more interested in keeping to the background. (Sure, there was Leland Orser's faux Romulan back in [“The Die Is Cast,”](#) but even then, Tain was the one who thought he was pulling the strings.)
- I lied about having things to say about the season. Sorry! It was good. The show has maintained the step up in quality of the third season, and found ways to deepen the Dominion conflict, as well as exploring character relationships, etc. Yup, I got nothing. On to season five!

Next week: Sisko and the others have to deal with the Gowron situation in “Apocalypse Rising,” and take a ride on a Jem'Hadar ship in “The Ship.”

SEASON FIVE

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Apocalypse Rising”/“The Ship”[Zack Handlen](#)[3/28/13 10:00AM](#)**“Apocalypse Rising” (season five, episode one; originally aired 9/30/1996)***In which Gowron shows his true colors...*

It must be fun working for Starfleet. If you’ve got a ship, you can spend most of your time ignoring communications and trying to dodge diplomatic escort missions (which, as gamers know, are the worst missions of all), but when the shit finally hits the fan, somebody’s going to pick up that red phone, and you damn well answer. It’s even worse if you’re stuck on an undermanned space station just on the edge of a warzone. When we left our heroes, Odo had just revealed the startling possibility that Gowron, the head of the Klingon Empire, and the Klingon who kept popping up on viewscreens throughout the episode calling for what sounded an awful lot like open war on the Federation, is a Changeling. “Apocalypse Rising” picks up a week or two after this, with Sisko and Dax finally return back to the station after a meeting with the higher-ups. Their shuttlecraft is in bad shape, but that’s just the beginning. Sisko calls a briefing soon after arriving home, and gives his crew the bad news: Starfleet has ordered them to infiltrate the Klingons’ most highly secure secret base, and with the aid of a special device no one has ever actually tested before, reveal Gowron’s true nature to his own kind. Which sound like fun.

Actually, since the mission involves Sisko, O’Brien, and Odo getting made-up to look like Klingons, it really is fun, with some solid twists and soul-searching sprinkled throughout. High stakes, big risk action stories provide a wealth of ways writers can keep their audience engaged, from the seemingly

insurmountable odds to the cavalier quip in the face of certain death, and one of the advantages to *DS9*'s on-going Dominion War arc is that it's a plotline that keeps creating opportunities for what happens next. The moderately serialized nature of the show means that an episode like this one, with its pulpy charms, can sit side by side with a still pulpy, but far grimmer hour like "The Ship" without any real issues of tonal whiplash. Both entries come across as the same show, and not just because of they share opening credits and the same cast; the premise is large enough to allow for multiple possibilities. Better still: It practically demands them.

So Sisko, O'Brien, and Odo get made up like Klingons, and with Worf as their guide, they commandeer Dukat's Bird Of Prey and make their way to Klingon territory. Kira, being pregnant and all, stays behind, which makes for some enjoyable banter between her and Bashir about the frustrations of bearing someone else's child. (In case you didn't know, Nana Visitor was actually pregnant for this, and Alexander Siddig was the father.) Plus there's a bit with Bashir and Jake about how Jake is worried about his father—nothing major, but it's a good example of how the writers find ways to briefly reconnect with all of the series' main characters before digging into the main plot. While Sisko ostensibly takes center stage as the episode's protagonist—he is, after all, the captain, and takes to being a Klingon with a lot more zest than the others. But it's Odo who serves as the heart of "Apocalypse Rising," Odo with his unsettlingly solid body, and his newfound doubts about his place on the station.

Obviously the ex-Changeling's transformation was going to cause some problems for him, but in a way, this latest depression is a manifestation of something that's been with Odo's character from the beginning. I've gone on at great length in these reviews about what I see as the character's self-imposed rigidity, his determination to hold to a single idea of himself, and to use that idea to define his purpose in the world. The thing is, that "idea" existed in large part as a reaction to his physical nature; Odo's obsession with the law, with order and rules, came about because his physiology left him perpetually in flux, a muscle that needed to be constantly flexed. In order for him to maintain his persona, he was literally required to concentrate on maintaining it at all times, which means it's only natural that he'd come to define himself in such simple, straightforward terms. But now the primary factor which drove his initial development is no longer relevant. It's only natural that he begins to question the rest of the choices he's made, and that sort of questioning leads him to the self-doubt that plagues him through much of the episode. When Sisko comes to see him about the mission into Klingon territory, Odo is savoring the bubbles in his drink, and trying to enjoy his new senses. But when Sisko tells him he's needed, Odo tries to back out. He used to know exactly who he was, and now that's not true anymore, so he assumes he doesn't have anything left.

What's effective about this is that it's never over-emphasized. We get a couple scenes of Odo acting depressed, but there's no question of him being included, and when his clumsiness puts the mission in jeopardy, it's less a matter of ineptitude than it is his insecurity coming to the fore. After some fun Klingon training from Worf (always yell up close, and do not hit another Klingon with the back of your hand unless you want a fight to the death) and a brief, brutal example of Dukat's combat philosophy (he doesn't have much problem destroying Klingon ships), our four heroes are beamed over to

headquarters, where they join the Klingon party already in process. It's as crazy as you'd expect, with bunch of warriors (both male and female, although more men than women as far as I could tell) drinking and shouting and punching each other; everyone's waiting for Gowron to arrive to induct them into the Order of Bat'leth, but as Worf explains, the party beforehand is almost as important as the induction ceremony, because it serves as a test of fortitude for the warriors involved. If you can manage to stay drinking and fighting for hours on end, and attend the next day's ceremony without missing a step, then you've earned your place. Our heroes cheat a bit by taking an anti-intoxicant beforehand, but it's still a long night, and Sisko manages to get in fight or two while waiting. (The first fight is when he overhears a Klingon boasting about murdering one of Sisko's old friends; the rest are probably just to keep him awake.)

Odo's mistake: When it comes time to set the devices in place that are supposed to reveal Gowron's true nature, Odo inadvertently drops his, and then needs Worf's intervention to come up with a lie to cover for the drop. The fumble is something that could happen to anyone, but Odo's terrified expression indicates he's still having to struggle to convince himself he's up to this. It's a quick moment, though, and Odo soon recovers; later, when a Klingon gets in his way, the constable manages to shove the guy aside without too much trouble. Then everything goes to hell when General Martok finally recognizes Sisko, even with his Klingon make-up on. (We last saw Martok at the start of the previous season, leading the Klingon force that ostensibly arrived at DS9 to help in the war against the Dominion.) Everybody gets captured, but some fast talking by Sisko and Odo seems to convince Martok of Gowron's duplicity. The general helps them escape and leads them back to the hall of warriors, where Worf challenges Gowron to a battle to the death, it being the only way left to expose the Changeling's true nature.

Only Gowron-as-Changeling seems a bit too simple now, just as it did when the twist was first announced, and it's Odo, having been held back by Martok before the battle begins, who puts it all together. That's crucial; not just that Martok is the Changeling and Gowron is not, but that Odo is the one who figures out what has happened, and is able to alert the others before everything falls apart. I'm not a huge fan of twists stacked on top of twists (it's not a terrible plot trick, but after awhile, the whole thing becomes so top-heavy that you're more invested in where the next betrayal is going to come from than you are in the actual characters), but this one works well enough. It's certainly the sort of lie the Federation would believe, and it's one more way to stick the knife into Odo's back, by making it even more explicit just how little he knows of his former people.

The real key, though, is that Odo is the one to see through the charade, because he was the one who provided the initial intel that set Sisko and the others on this mission. If someone else had figured it out, or if Gowron had been killed before the truth was revealed, Odo would've been wrecked, possibly beyond repair—the shame of mishandling the one positive to come from his time in the Great Link, of being used to betray what are now his only true friends, would've been devastating for him, and bordering on sadism from a narrative standpoint. (There's nothing wrong with making characters suffer for a reason, but too much suffering, and it becomes almost farcical.) Instead, Odo realizes the truth, and forces the fake Martok out in the open, where he's quickly despatched by Klingon phaser

fire. Gowron, pleased at having a traitor removed from his ranks, sends Sisko and the others back home (after praising Odo and getting a few cheap shots at Worf, who totally kicked his ass), and when they're back at the station getting their faces put back together, Bashir tells Odo he can make him look more human or Bajoran or whatever, if he wants to. Odo stays with his old face. It's about as direct a sign you could hope for that he once again remembers who he is.

Stray observations:

- To my mind, *Deep Space Nine* possesses the ideal balance for most ongoing serialized TV shows: Too little serialization and *DS9* would lose its narrative advantages, and too much means risking a lot of “let's stall for time” style entries that plague stuff like [The Walking Dead](#). For my money, the only effective heavily serialized show on the air right now is [Breaking Bad](#), which has the benefit of Vince Gilligan and his writing staff, and more importantly, a narrative that specifically lends itself to heavy serialization. Content should dictate structure, not the other way around, and too many shows these days see that serialization is the new thing and latch onto it as though the style in and of itself is justification enough. All of which is to say, the balance *DS9* has achieved works pretty damn great.
- I wonder way Martok held Odo back from the confrontation at the end. Given that, had Worf succeeded, Sisko, O'Brien, and Worf would've almost certainly been killed in the ensuing mob, are the Changelings still invested in Odo's safety? And if so, does that mean they still consider him one of their own, all words to the contrary?
- High Changeling body count this week. That will probably not go over well.
- O'Brien is a block-faced Klingon.
- It makes sense that Martok would recognize Sisko and the others even with their new faces. As a Changeling, he expects the familiar to take many different forms.
- “I could do without the ridges, but I kind of miss the fangs.”—Sisko, who really does make an excellent Klingon.

“The Ship” (season 5, episode 2; originally aired 10/7/1996)

In which O'Brien loses a friend...

People die all the time on *Star Trek*. The high mortality rate of red-shirted extras in [the original series](#) has long been part of franchise lore, but the truth is, it never really mattered what color your uniform was; if you weren't a main cast member, and a threat needed to be proven, then the odds were against you. It was even worse if the audience was given a chance to get to know you just enough to lend your death dramatic impact. In [“Balance Of Terror,”](#) one of the high points of the original series' first season (and the episode that introduces the Romulans), the story begins with Kirk officiating a wedding between two crew members we've never seen before. Then everything goes to hell, and in

the course of the hell-going, one of those crew members is killed. It's the most blatant, obvious trick imaginable, and, as was often the case with *TOS*, there isn't a lot of subtlety to the way it's deployed. But if you can get past the corniness, and the artifice, the trick still fundamentally works. Empathy is a powerful tool, even (and often especially) when deployed bluntly. But even more than that, I think there's something personal about those broadly drawn corpses. Were we to find ourselves on a star ship or a space station or an alien world, odds are, we wouldn't last much longer than they did.

DS9 is generally more subtle and complex than its forebears, but in "The Ship," the writers demonstrate they still know the old tricks, and are more than willing to use them when the situation warrants. In the cold open, we see O'Brien and a relatively new guy (who's apparently been on the show twice before, although I didn't recognize him) named Muñiz (F.J. Rio) walking around and looking at the rocks. The two banter, and there's an obvious affection between the two men that immediately makes you wonder why, exactly, we're seeing this. Casual conversations pop up on the show all the time, but they're almost always between main characters, or a main character and a recurring character. Muñiz ribbing O'Brien about getting winded during the hike isn't just a casual piece of texture before the plot begins in earnest. There are only 40 minutes per episode to tell a story, and that's not much time at all; every scene counts. (Unless the script is terrible and it's all padding, of course, but this scene doesn't come across as padding.) So from the very start, we're given special reason to notice Muñiz, to care a little about him, and to wonder why we care.

So, yeah: This isn't subtle. But "The Ship" is an excellent hour, and that directness of intent works very much in the episode's favor. I'm not saying I knew Muñiz was going to die; I spent a lot of the time really hoping he wouldn't. But by putting the manipulation front and center, by reminding us again and again of how much Muñiz's injury and eventual death bothers O'Brien and the others, the script takes the cliché of the doomed guest star and makes its fundamental predictability work in the story's favor. The point isn't that Muñiz is going to die. The point is that he isn't the first good person to die in the Dominion War, and he won't be the last. For Sisko and O'Brien and Dax and Worf, every fresh face on the station is just another potential liability, another name to add the list in their memory that keeps getting longer. Muñiz and the others who die here are killed not just for the audience's direct benefit (lucky us), but to show how their deaths affect the characters we'll be seeing week in, and week out, until the end of the series. It's not the most organic plot development in the world (it's not just Muñiz, but another guy on the ground who gets it without an exist line, and a whole shuttle full of fresh faces; good thing this didn't happen when Kira was piloting, eh?), but the way it's deployed, and the slow, painful manner of Muñiz's death, transcends the limitations.

As to the actual story, it's a good one: While doing a routine mineral survey on a Gamma Quadrant planet, Sisko and his team witness the crash of a Jem'Hadar ship. They quickly investigate, and find the entire crew inside, dead before their ship hit the atmosphere due to an engine malfunction. Before anyone can figure out the best way to get the ship back in the air again, more Jem'Hadar arrive, destroying the shuttle orbiting the planet and trapping Sisko, Worf, Dax, O'Brien, and the severely injured Muñiz inside the ship. A Vorta named Kalina (Kaitlin Hopkins) offers to parlay with Sisko, but it's just an attempt to distract him long enough for a long Jem'Hadar soldier to beam into the ship,

where he's killed before he can find whatever it is he's looking for. And he was looking for something. Sisko quickly realizes that Kilana and the Jem'Hadar aren't after the ship so much as some mysterious cargo that the Vorta refuses to identify.

So now we have a mystery and a siege situation, with a plausible reason for why the Jem'Hadar (who vastly outnumber and outgun Sisko and the others) don't immediately attack. The mystery won't be solved until the very end, which means that while we wait, we get to see how these characters hold up under pressure. While they don't crack as badly as, say, a bunch of strangers holed up in a house against an army of zombies, the strain shows. The Jem'Hadar constantly bombard the ship with explosions that are far enough away not to do any damage, but close enough to make your teeth rattle, and of course poor Muñiz is dying over in the corner, going from conscious and coherent to hallucinating his childhood and the fireworks of Carnival. So things get a bit tense, most notable between O'Brien and Worf. Worf insists that Muñiz be told he's dying, so that he can face death with honor; O'Brien refuses to accept this, believing that there's always hope. It's easier to side with O'Brien, but given Muñiz's gradual descent into fever and death, it's hard to fault Worf's more pragmatic approach. Both philosophies are a way to put meaning into an event that's fundamental to our existence, but at the same time unfathomable. To Worf, honor comes before all. To O'Brien, it's hope.

Sisko is having his own problems trying to hold everyone together, and when he finally realizes what the "mysterious cargo" is, it's too late to do much about it. There was a Changeling on the ship, hiding in plain sight the whole time, and when he or she isn't able to return to liquid form in time, it collapses, turning into a pile of ash. I'm not exactly sure why the Changeling didn't try and escape on its own; if the crash had rendered the creature unconscious somehow, how would he or she have been able to maintain a shape that blended into the ship's bridge for so long? And if he or she was conscious the whole time, I'm not sure I accept that such a powerful being would've been too frightened to contact Sisko directly. But then, there's no way of knowing how bad the Changeling's injuries were—and besides, this does speak to one of the truths of the Founders that we've known since their introduction: They do not trust the solids. Not even when they have to.

In the end, Sisko gets the ship he wants, and he and Dax tell each other it was worth all those deaths, but that doesn't make it easier. It shouldn't. What's especially painful is how easily all of this could've been avoided with a little more trust, a little less paranoia. If Sisko had known there was a Changeling aboard the ship, he would release the creature; at least that's what he tells Kalina, and I believe him. (They certainly couldn't have gotten off the planet with the Founder in tow.) And if he'd released the Changeling, Kalina would have let him leave with the ship, which is all he wanted in the first place. But because war doesn't work like that, a bunch of people are dead who didn't need to be, and Sisko can't stop staring at the list of names. And in the hold, O'Brien and Worf sit in guard over Muñiz's corpse, paying last respects and making sure the body stays safe. They'd done this before. They'll do it again.

Stray observations:

- I cried at the end. I was doing okay until Worf showed up, and then Niagara Falls.

- Kalina showed a bit more cleavage than the Vorta usually do (in my limited experience with Vorta). It's an interesting negotiating tactic; she's not trying to seduce Sisko, but she does go to great lengths to appear vulnerable.
- Forgot to mention: The Jem'Hadar all kill themselves after the Changeling dies, for failing to protect one of their gods. And they're so normally low-key, too.

Next week: We dive into the improbably named "Looking For Par'Mach In All the Wrong Places," and follow Jake into war with "...Nor The Battle To The Strong."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Looking For Par’Mach In All The Wrong Places”/“...Nor The Battle To The Strong”



[Zack Handlen](#)

[4/04/13 10:00AM](#)

“Looking for Par’Mach in All the Wrong Places” (season five, episode three; originally aired 10/14/1996)

In which the key to a woman’s heart is through her bat’leth

Dax and Worf have sex. Apart from that, little of consequence occurs in “Looking For Par’Mach In All The Wrong Places,” a title as goofily indulgent as the majority of the script. Unless you were really hoping for Quark to get it together and finally screw that Klingon woman we haven’t seen in a few seasons, this isn’t an hour with much weight at all, but given what comes before and after it in the schedule, that might be a good thing; it’s nice to have a light, silly bit of fluff before we get back to the agonies of war. And overall, this is an entertaining enough attempt at sex comedy, made palatable by Dorn, Shimerman, and Farrell’s efforts to keep things moving, and the Dax/Worf hook-up makes decent sense. The actors don’t have amazing chemistry together, but they do seem to fit together well, forming a connection that doesn’t reduce either character. It’s hard to say at this point just how this pairing will affect the show in the long run, but the signs are promising in that it all seems pretty low-key. Worf didn’t realize Dax was into him, Dax played along for a while, then she finally made her move, and that’s that. No major drama or pining necessary.

Out of everything that happens in “Par’Mach,” the most ridiculous is the brief flirtation between O’Brien and Kira which raises some weird issues, and then gets quickly, and mercifully, dropped. It

makes a certain amount of sense that there'd be boundary issues between them. First Kira is carrying "his" baby (and while it gets mocked in the cold open of the next episode, the constant referrals to Miles' as the owner of the kid get old), and then she's living with the O'Briens, and now the Chief is giving her regular massages, sampling the medicine Bashir prescribes her, and basically getting involved with every aspect of her life. Inevitably, tensions would arise, and a mutual attraction is certainly less unpleasant to watch than the fighting Bashir and Quark eavesdrop on in the cold open. But it's just such an unexpected flare up of chemistry between two actors who've never seemed all that interested in one another before. So far as we know, Kira's still in a relationship with Shakaar, and apart from O'Brien's solicitude and his general Colm Meaney-ness, it's hard to know what the draw is. And it's not like O'Brien's desire is reasonable, either—he's never looked at another woman apart from Keiko, not even when she was away from the station for months. Pregnancy hormones on the one side, intimate physical contact with a friend on the other... I dunno. It doesn't really seem to fit either character, and it's never as funny as it needs to be to justify itself. While the pregnancy swap was a clever way to keep Nana Visitor on the show, it hasn't lent itself to exciting storylines, and this is no exception. There are a few laughs, but mostly it just doesn't work.

Thankfully, the main plot, with Worf seeing and immediately falling for Grilka (Mary Kay Adams), a Klingon woman and head of household who we haven't seen since ["The House Of Quark,"](#) is more effective. It's still wafer thin, but there are some legitimate laughs, and the development of Worf and Dax's relationship is welcome. The set-up: Grilka arrives on the station with her bodyguard and her maester (or whatever he's called) in tow, to ask Quark for some help looking over her accounts. The war with the Federation has hit the House of Grilka hard, and she needs to pick up extra cash anyway she can. But this is an almost entirely irrelevant plot detail, introduced at the beginning to give Grilka a reason for being on the station, and then forgotten. It's worth mentioning only because it's a reminder how well the show uses it's big story arc to connect smaller, less important stories together. Quark wooing Grilka has nothing to do with the fight against the Founders, but at least we're reminded that the machinations the Founders have set in motion effect everything in ways that are impossible to predict.

Worf being Worf, he sets about pitching woo in the appropriate Klingon fashion, ie shouting and picking fights and insulting Grilka's companions. He's quickly informed that his attentions are not wanted; given the standing of his house, there's no way Grilka could entertain a proposal from him without severely hurting her own standing in the Empire. This bums Worf out, and he turns to Dax for comfort, which Dax provides as best she can, all the while politely questioning Worf's affections for the lady. Which, even if she wasn't interested in Worf herself, would be a reasonable thing to do. Worf has never so much as conversed with Grilka before he decides she's his everything, and while that's necessary for the plot to unfold the way it does, it makes him look like a star-crossed idiot. Maybe if Worf was 15 years-old, this would be reasonable, but he isn't; he's been married, and had a kid, and dated other women, so he's had some experience. It's possible to hand-wave this as a case of loneliness and over-compensating for exile (Worf is still struggling with being alone, so of course he'd be attracted to someone he sees as representing the highest ideals of Klingon culture), but really, he's

drawn to Grilka so that when Quark comes by looking for some tips on how to seduce a Klingon female, Worf can go full Cyrano on him.

Using plotlines from classic drama is a time-worn tradition on television (and in literature and theater and film), and it often yields terrific results; the only drawback is that it can take a bit of character shifting to make everyone fit into the appropriate roles. Quark really really wanting to have sex with Grilka makes sense from their last encounter, and Dax basically just hangs out in the background, offering advice and occasional sarcasm. (She's like a living Twitter feed!) But Worf's infatuation could've used a little more justification, given that he's been so stand-offish and private since arriving on DS9. Which isn't to say the feelings don't make sense, or that his desire for privacy indicates some fundamental lack of interest in sex; just that the episode is so eager to get to the loopy, "Worf feeds Quark some info about Klingon mating, and Quark keeps digging himself in deeper" angle that it has to use character shortcuts. Viewed from another angle, this is a sad but ultimately redemptive story about how Worf's devotion to a culture that keeps shutting him out leads him to a relationship with an actual equal. That it's largely played for laughs isn't inherently bad, but it does come across as a bit thin.

There's also the fact that Grilka barely registers. At one point, Dax takes Worf to task for worshipping an ideal, but given how little we see of the real thing, and how much of her on-screen time is spent responding to Quark/Worf's overtures, it's hard to see Grilka as anything but. She got more to do in "The House Of Quark," so I guess there's some history established, and it's not like this episode is really about her, but the idea of essentially finding a way into a woman's bed through a series of specific, pre-planned gestures blurs the line between romantic engagement and a Leisure Suit Larry game (or just The Game, I guess), and the fact that Grilka simply exists to be coveted makes the whole thing a little on the awkward side. Still, Mary Kay Adams gives her role some winning energy, and it's clear from the start that she's doing exactly what she wants to do; Quark doesn't trick her into sex so much as he works very, very hard to give her a reason to jump him, and when she does, there's no question who's the aggressor. In fact, there's something charming about the way Grilka and Dax's stories both climax (heh) with women putting the moves on men. In the last scene, Quark, Worf, and Dax all check themselves into the infirmary after violent bouts of love-making, and while in theory this could've been disturbing, it's all played cheerfully, like most everything else in the hour. Worf asks Dax what their hook-up means in the long term, but Dax doesn't want to commit just yet. Of course she doesn't. It's not that kind of episode.

Stray observations:

- Kira's long, increasingly romantic description of her friend's house on Bajor is a very well-played joke. I love how both O'Brien and Kira get more incredulous as it goes on.
- Odo and Kira are having their meetings still! That's nice. (Also, is it just me or is Odo smiling more often now that he's a solid?)
- "War. What is it good for. If you ask me, absolutely nothing." -Quark, getting his Edwin Starr on.

- “I will apologize for this at a later time.” -Worf, right before picking a fight with Morn in order to attract Grilka’s attention.
- Oh, and Worf uses a thingie so he can control Quark’s actions while Quark fights with Grilka’s bodyguard. I’m not sure how this works, because I don’t know how Worf can see what the bodyguard is doing during the fight, but the fight scene was entertaining.

“Nor To The Battle The Strong” (season five, episode four; originally aired 10/21/1996)

In which Jake gets in over his head...

Note to aspiring journalists/writers/artists/fools: never, ever get excited about getting to the good stuff. Never look forward to your first war. Never complain about the dull tedium of normal, not-getting-shot-at living, because really all you’re doing is complaining that your skin is still solid enough to keep your organs in. Do your best to treasure peace, quiet, tedious life, because if you don’t, God or whomever is in charge of ironic fates will use your ignorance as an excuse to ruin your life. Maybe you’ll get away with only some bad memories and the taste of shame coating the next five thousand meals. Maybe you’ll lose the use of your legs. It’s one of the unbreakable laws of drama that eventually, hubris must be punished, and while you may learn some important lessons about the cost of fighting, and what death really looks like, you’re better off just staying in bed. If you don’t, you’ll probably have to meet some guy named Steve, and he’ll tell you about the girl he left behind, and then you’ll watch his face get blown off.

To be fair, it’s not like Jake Sisko was doing anything that wrong. We haven’t had a ton of Jake-centric episodes the past couple of seasons, and one of them ([“The Muse”](#)) was probably one of the worst hours I’ve seen on the show; but between “Nor To The Battle The Strong” and [“The Visitor,”](#) the character can definitely work, particularly when he’s put in situations where he’s observing a situation and trying to come to terms with his place in it. In “The Visitor,” Jake was on the outside of his father’s situation, just as his father was on the outside of the timeline, and over the course of his life, the younger Sisko struggled with what it’s like to be someone actually stuck inside one of those crazy time travel stories that have been with the franchise from the beginning. In this latest episode, he visits a war zone with Dr. Bashir, at first interested in recording the situation for an article he’s supposed to write, but almost immediately becoming involved with what’s happening, and learning about parts of himself he would’ve rather kept hidden. In both cases, it’s Jake’s awareness of himself that both help him keep going, and punish him. In “The Visitor,” a less empathetic man, a man incapable of imagining what life might be like for his father, skipping like a stone across the decades, might have moved on, or treated the intervals as some kind of religious experience. In “Battle,” someone less inclined to observe might have had an easier time doing what needed to be done; and someone less relentlessly introspective would’ve been less troubled by his cowardice in the face of physical danger.

Unfortunately, Jake’s positioned in just the right place to find himself in Hell, and “Battle” does a surprisingly unsparing job of putting him there. Things unfold in a predictable enough fashion, at least

at first. Jake and Bashir are returning in a roundabout after attending a medical conference; Bashir delivered a presentation at the conference, and Jake has a job writing an article about him. It's not going well, despite Bashir's effusiveness, mostly because Jake is bored, and doesn't understand half of what the good doctor is throwing at him. But then the roundabout gets a distress signal from a nearby planet; the Klingons have attacked a system, casualties are flooding in, there's a hospital that needs help, that sort of thing. Bashir wants to bring Jake back to the station before going to assist, but Jake pleads to come along. To his mind, this is a terrific opportunity to get to write the kind of article he wants to write, something thrilling and intense and passionate about the dangers of life in the trenches.

In case you forgot my opening paragraph, what happens next is some totally expected bubble-bursting. The hospital is underground, and in constant, chaotic flux. Patients scream from beds, or lie slumped over against rocks, dead or dying, and there are always more coming in. Wherever Jake stands, he's always in someone's way, and eventually he's given up on note-taking and is just helping out as best he can, mostly carrying the injured too and from beds, and, occasionally, the morgue. (Which is just a big cavern off to one side full of bags.) Given that Jake is a good kid, and a smart one, the transition from "Golly gee, a war!" to "Dear god, make it stop" is a quick one, and for a while, at least, he's contributing, just another member of the team, wearing the same scrubs as everyone else. And yeah, this is all pretty familiar. I don't mean that as a detriment, either; this was well done, and there was an efficiency and professionalism to everyone that made the insanity of the conflict just beyond them all the more apparent.

Then things take a turn. It starts with a patient Jake is trying to help, a young Starfleet cadet with a broken foot. He claims it was injured by falling rocks, but Bashir scans the wound and discovers it was made by phaser fire. Jake stays with the cadet for a few moments, and you realize that the reason the man lied about his injury was because it was self-inflicted. He saw what was happening, he saw all the dying and the screaming around him, and he just couldn't handle it, so he shot himself in the foot. As he explains, this was very tricky work, and took some planning. Maybe that's how he justifies it to himself. He may be a coward, but at least he isn't lazy.

Jake doesn't seem much bothered by this; he chats with Kirby (Andrew Kavovit), another body-hauler, and they discuss how bad things are going to get. Back on Deep Space Nine, Sisko has learned that the Klingon attack has crossed over into the same zone as the hospital where Bashir and Jake are working. Sisko immediately leaves with Dax on the *Defiant* to come to the rescue, but long before they get there, a Klingon bombardment knocks out power in the caves. Bashir and Jake offer to go get the portable generator out of their runabout (which they landed nearby, since leaving it in orbit would have made too tempting a target), and when they go outside, they're almost immediately bombarded by exploding shells. In the middle of the assault, Bashir gets ahead of Jake, and is knocked down by shell. Jake hesitates for a split-second, and then turns tail and runs blindly away.

The moment isn't overplayed or even underlined; when it happened, I wasn't immediately sure if we were supposedly to think Jake had reacted out of panicky fear, or if he'd just assumed Bashir was

dead, or what. That's important, because while Jake never entirely forgives himself for his behavior, there's little sense that the moral framework of the episode is designed to punish him. Yes, it would have been more heroic for him to rush forward and try and help his friend, but that decision wasn't one he had that much conscious control over. That's one of the reasons the immediacy of war is so horrifying; it can reduce anyone to a frightened animal, acting purely on instinct. Things get worse when Jake finds a soldier bleeding to death in the mud on the side of a hill. The soldier's teeth-grinding intensity could've come across as camp, but it doesn't—instead, it just feels like the next step in a nightmare that goes on and on. Jake can't even stop the guy from dying. He can't even give himself the illusion that, by running this way, he made the smart choice because he was able to save a life. The guy just dies, in horrible pain, and Jake starts running again. (According to the IMDB cast page, the guy is Chief Burke, played by Danny Goldring. He looks like they beamed him in from Vietnam circa 1969.)

Jake is a wreck for the rest of the episode, mumbling and sullen around people who had become his friends, unable to tell Bashir what had really happened, and finally snapping at Kirby and the others when he can't stand their jokes about dying anymore. We don't get to know the hospital staff of "Battle" in-depth, but we know them just well enough to like them, and the script does a fine job giving just enough of a sketch of everyone to imagine they were spun out of some completely different show. They deal with war the way combat docs on TV always do, with a lot of callow jokes and long nights, and there's something very human and beaten in the way Jake blows up at them. There's no easy resolution to all of this, either. The Klingons finally arrive in the caves, and everyone escapes, but Jake gets inadvertently left behind. He grabs a phaser lying on a desk, ducks behind cover, and starts firing wildly around. It's not an action hero moment, and when his blind-firing happens to bring down a large part of the ceiling on the attacking Klingons' heads, it's a matter of luck that he doesn't kill himself in the process.

This is not an episode intent on lecturing us about much of anything. Yes, there's a definitely impression of the horrors of combat, but it's presented almost as a simple matter of fact, just this thing that's happening that these people have to deal with. It's not like the Federation started the war; and weirdly, there's not a lot of raging against the Klingons either (not any, if I remember right). War is more like a natural element, a constant presence, and Jake learns, to his horror, that crisis does not lead inevitably to transcendence. The only peace he finds in the end is by writing it all down, and being as honest and straightforward as possible, because that's who he is. To me, "Battle" comes down to the fact that people like Jake are just as valuable as people like Bashir and Captain Sisko and Kira and the rest, and that the great value of civilization is that it builds cities and creates laws and turns on the lights to protect people who don't always know what to do when the violence starts. Society exists so that cowards can become something more. Having the Federation, and a loving father, allows someone like Jake to exist, and, better still, find his way home.

Stray observations:

- "Listen to me, I'm actually rooting for the plague." -Jake, being self-aware.

- I unironically love Jake's civilian clothes. That coat is amazing.
- There's a bit more with Sisko and Dax on the *Defiant*—she tells him a story about one of her past lives which is only mildly comforting—but while it's nicely acted, I wonder if the episode would've been better off without it. Anytime we leave Jake, some of the intensity gets lost. I can understand not wanting to go all out on a show like this, but it's still frustrating. (I do like the idea that Odo injured himself because he forgot he was a solid.)
- I'm not sure if it's been mentioned before, but I like the idea that Klingons have no problem killing the wounded and civilians, because to them, that's just an honorable death.

Next week: O'Brien gets "The Assignment," and we take a trip back to a long time ago in "Trials And Tribble-ations."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Assignment”/“Trials And Tribble-ations”[Zack Handlen](#)[4/11/13 10:00AM](#)**“The Assignment” (season five, episode five; originally aired 10/28/1996)***In which O’Brien sleeps with someone who is not his wife...*

Hostage plots are a mixed bag. They’re tempting to writers, because they come with immediate, visceral stakes—“Oh no! My wife/husband/daughter/son/parent/cousin/gerbil has been taken away!”—and, more intriguingly, those stakes force characters to make difficult choices. Not just difficult choices—choices that run counter to those characters’ established behavior. In other words, you have a hero, it’s pretty easy to predict what he’ll do when trouble arises, because you’ve seen him deal with trouble dozens of times before; plus, just being a hero brings with it certain basic ethical requirements. But if that hero has been coerced into acting in order to protect the wellbeing of someone he cares about, that range of behavior shifts. O’Brien is one of *DS9*’s most reliable protagonists. Being reliable is, in fact, one of his defining traits. He’s not really the cunning mastermind that Sisko is (although he has his moments); he’s not as idealistically pure as Bashir, or as determined to track down the truth as Odo; and he’s certainly not as morally ambiguous as Garak. He’s just a gifted engineer and stolid “reasonable man” type, someone not destined for high command, but incredibly important when it comes to making sure everything’s working properly. Yet “The Assignment” has him at odds with his closest friends, sabotaging the inner workings of the station, and fighting against an ancient alien race. And it’s all because some idiot ghost being decides to kidnap Keiko.

But I said “mixed bag,” didn’t I? Because as tempting as hostage plots are for the writers, it’s hard to get excited about them as a viewer. The beats are predictable: lots of “I WANT TO TALK TO MY [missing so-and-so]!” and stalling tactics from the hero, and you know the whole thing probably won’t get resolved until the end, which means there’s some uncomfortable lying and nervous tension and whatnot. It’s rarely ever a good idea to tell an audience what’s going to happen next, and then have that happen next, without much variation, and while that’s not exactly what happens in this sort of storyline, the simple act of kidnapping sets up a specific obstacle that has to be resolved. Not just “beat the bad guys” or “don’t die,” but “I have to get my [missing so-and-so] back.” It’s a small difference, but it makes everything a little more tedious. You end up waiting for the kidnapping to be taken care of so the real story can get underway, but generally, the kidnapping takes up the whole running time. In a weird way, the very emotional resonance that makes the plot so tempting also makes it frustrating, because it happens all the damn time. Or maybe this is just because I covered [24](#) for a few seasons, and that seemed to be the go-to plot twist for stalling out another hour.

Regardless, there is, as mentioned, a kidnapping plot in “The Assignment,” and it’s pretty much the only plot the episode has. Yet it works, and works brilliantly, another fantastic entry to the pantheon of Bad Days for Miles O’Brien. There are smart choices throughout. For one thing, Keiko doesn’t disappear, exactly. When she returns from a trip to Bajor at the beginning of the episode, O’Brien is nervous about telling her her bonsai plants have died (Bashir over-watered them), but within seconds, Keiko casually tells him the real crisis: she’s not exactly Keiko anymore. An alien force has taken over Mrs. O’Brien, and will only release the lady if O’Brien follows that force’s specific instructions. Until this happens, the alien will be running Keiko (who I will henceforth refer to as “Fake-o” because it makes me laugh), and threatening her with a brain hemorrhage if O’Brien gets any bright ideas about rebellion. The back and forth between hero and villain is usually a highlight in this kind of storyline, and here, there’s the added attraction of Fake-o using O’Brien’s very real love for his wife against him in a present and undeniable way. Rosalind Chao has a lot of fun with the part, and whether or not it’s intentional, the fact that Fake-o isn’t that much different from the real Keiko makes the whole thing all the more unsettling.

It also helps that Fake-o is smart, ruthless, and entertainingly pleased with itself; the creature, using knowledge of O’Brien gleaned from Keiko’s brain, is able to stay ahead of the chief for most of the running time, smirking the whole time, which keeps the story moving at a good clip. The important point being, the villain is never dumb just for the sake of expedience. One of the silly parts of hostage plots is that the bad guys aren’t just trying to coerce the hero into committing a crime—they’re using one of the hero’s nearest and dearest to do so, a loved one who has to be close to the hero, or else the whole scheme would be worthless. (“We’ve kidnapped your second grade teacher!” “Who?” “Mrs. Tozier.” “Who?” “The one with the limp.” “Wait, the one who failed me at vocab?” “Hold on, I’ll check... Yes. Yes, that’s her. She says she hopes your cursive improved. Now you must do our bidding!” “Look, I’ll call you back.”) But that also means the bad guys are going out of their way to make sure the hero has a very real, and very emotional, reason to want to shut you down. (Watch *Commando* if you want to see how badly this can turn out.) But Fake-o has mostly circumvented this problem by putting

itself in its victim's body, thus making it almost impossible for O'Brien to stun or incapacitate the creature before it has time to murder his wife. The threat never becomes distant or removed from the action, and that pressure makes for a better episode.

And of course making O'Brien the center of the action helps to keep everything balanced. As he makes clear from the start, as much as he loves his wife, there is no way O'Brien would be willing to hurt anyone on the station. For most of the episode's running time, we have no idea what the modifications Fake-o orders the chief to perform are meant to accomplish, which adds a bit of mystery, and helps keep O'Brien's actions in a sort of moral gray area. Even when his work draws the attention of the main crew, the closest he comes to out and out villainy is punching Odo in the face; which isn't great, but there are no betrayals here that will linger long after the hour is over. That makes the episode more fun—and make no mistake, as creepy as it sometimes gets, and as upset as O'Brien is (he even breaks a glass in his hand, the classic "I am suppressing a lot of feelings right now" move), this is a fun one. It's structured like a game. The rules are, O'Brien has to follow Fake-o's commands, and give no obvious sign of disobedience, while simultaneously making sure his work goes unnoticed by his friends and co-workers and figuring out what Fake-o's plans are, and how to stop them. It's a seemingly insurmountable task, especially when you factor in the time restrictions (Fake-o wants the whole thing finished in 13 hours). And that's where Rom comes in.

Here's another reason to dig "The Assignment": The cold open looks like a toss-off, one-joke bit, but it's actually fairly crucial to the rest of the episode, getting us up to speed with the ups and downs of Rom's engineering career, and reminding us how eager he is to make friends with his new co-workers. Rom is still stuck on the night shift (working on waste-extraction units, which must be fun; also, is this the first time anyone has ever mentioned "waste extraction" on Star Trek?), but he's determined to make it work despite Quark's snide commentary, even to the point of ordering one of O'Brien's standard breakfast meals. This is a nice piece of business that makes it easy to empathize with both sides. We want Rom to succeed, because he obviously wasn't having much luck under Quark's tutelage, while at the same time understanding Quark's obvious discomfort at seeing Rom try to push aside his own heritage to fit in. The scene is played for laughs, but there's a complexity to it that makes it linger. Rom is doing what he needs to do to be happy; but that doesn't necessarily come without a cost.

This all looks like some kind of ill-advised B-plot; while O'Brien rushes around trying to rewire the station, Rom will be doing his thing. This would've been a terrible choice. When you're telling a story as intentionally suspenseful and claustrophobic as a hostage plot, the last thing you want is to keep reminding viewers that there are other people on the station leading their lives. It's a distraction, especially with a character like Rom, who tends to have more comedic plots. But Rom actually turns out to be crucial to O'Brien's efforts, in a deeply satisfying way. The deadline Fake-o imposes on O'Brien's work has him running around like a crazy man, but Rom is the first (and for a while, only) person to notice anything wrong, mainly because he picks up on one of the changes O'Brien made. So O'Brien lies to him, and recruits him for the work. It gets really uncomfortable when Odo starts asking about the changes, and O'Brien is forced to turn over his guileless, eager-to-please assistant to the

cops. But Rom keeps quiet, and even better, Rom figures out what O'Brien has been too distracted to put together himself: The modifications Fake-o has ordered are designed to turn the station into a big chroniton laser, aiming directly at the wormhole.

There's a lot of just-on-the-edge-silliness stuff about Fake-o being a Pah-Wraith (the Pah-Wraiths are supposedly mythical creatures living in the fire caves on Bajor; and that just happens to be where Keiko was visiting during her trip), and the Pah-Wraiths wanting revenge on the wormhole aliens, and so on. It's never overplayed, which helps to sell the idea; we never see any actual physical evidence of the wraith, and the wormhole aliens don't make an appearance at the end to thank O'Brien for his efforts. It's just the barest of justifications for everything that happens, which, in stories like this, is all you really need. In the end, O'Brien saves the day and his wife and daughter, and Rom, for his troubles, gets promoted to the day shift. It's really just business as usual on Deep Space Nine, and another reminder of the lengths O'Brien will go to to protect his family. He never seriously steps over the line, but he dances with it a bit, and there's no sense of soul-searching on his part for doing what needs to be done; Keiko and Molly are his life, and it's great to get such thrilling, ultimately heartwarming proof of that. Here's hoping Odo doesn't mind the sore jaw.

Stray observations:

- So it looks like Odo is a lot easier to knock out as a solid. Also, he's smiling a lot more than he used to. I almost wish the show would spend more time with him, just to get a sense of how much his personality has changed since the body-shift; there's a looseness about him now, oddly. (It's not like he's missed a step as an investigator, though.)
- Bashir and O'Brien bantering about Keiko's dead plants is just another reminder that they're the more reliable comedic duo on the show. (Something we'll get even better examples of in the very next episode.)
- Rosalind Chao really does excellent work here. She never tips over into cackling villainy, but her clear amusement over O'Brien's concerns, and the way she smiles as she threatens him and Molly, is very effective.
- "Rom, everybody on the station knows your name." "Right. But I won't confirm it!" —O'Brien, questioning Rom's clandestine skills

"Trials And Tribble-ations" (season five, episode six; originally aired 11/4/1996)

In which a tribble explodes, and Dax wears thigh-high boots...

["The Trouble With Tribbles"](#) is one of [Star Trek](#)'s successful forays into comedy, and while I have a few reservations about it, it holds up well. I mean, they don't make [commemorative plates](#) for *Voyager* episodes, right? (God, what a terrible way to diet: punishing yourself every time you finish a meal.) William Shatner normally gets stuck playing the straight man whenever wackiness happens, and "The Trouble With Tribbles" is no exception to the rule; he seems to be having more fun than usual with the

premise, though, and some of his reaction shots here are Leonard Nimoy-level hysterical. Kirk's growing frustration and bemusement could've come off as smug, but it doesn't. Instead, he sets the tone for the entire episode; playful, often silly, with just enough of a grounded storyline to keep from floating away com—

Hold on a second. This is starting to sound a little familiar. (And over-written.) Let me just re-adjust my temporal display, and... there. That should do the trick.

"Trials And Tribble-ations" is a confection, a delight, a lark; a standalone episode on a show usually neck-deep in continuity that serves no greater purpose than to pay homage to the past. Produced in part as a tribute to the original *Star Trek's* 30th anniversary (speaking of *Voyager*, it did its own tribute with "Flashback"; anybody know if it's any good?), the hour has Sisko and his crew getting sucked back in time, where they intermingle with events from "The Trouble With Tribbles" in an attempt to stop the future (well, present) version of that story's villain from succeeding where his younger self failed. Confused? Don't be. The plot is barely relevant, serving (with little pretense) as an excuse for *DS9's* heroes to wander around the old *Enterprise*, dressed up in classic costume and even occasionally stumbling into old footage. It's not tightly plotted, and once the initial rush of nostalgia fades, there isn't a lot of depth or suspense to replace it. But there are laughs, more than enough to justify the experiment, and the nostalgia never fades away entirely.

The playfulness starts straight off, as two men from the Temporal Investigation Bureau arrive on the station with questions for Sisko about a recent adventure. (If any *Star Trek* concept cried out for a spin-off, it's the Temporal Investigation Bureau.) Dulmer and Lucsly (anagrams for "Mulder" and "Scully") are there to make sure that nothing untoward happened during the Defiant's trip through time, and Sisko, only moderately irritated by their presence, sets out to tell them a tale—said tale accounting for the bulk of "Trials And Tribble-ations." Given the number of time travel episodes we've seen on the various *Trek* series (and on film), this is a clever way to distinguish this particular jaunt right from the get go. Usually, time travel is treated like an incredibly dangerous, and possibly universe threatening, mistake. Here, it's just a goof, and the sort of goof that causes irritating, irritated bureaucrats stacks of paperwork and hours of headaches. Their collective groan when Sisko mentions James T. Kirk's name speaks to years of aggravating, control freak busywork.

There is, or was, something on the line, though. It begins with the Defiant taking a trip to Cardassia to pick up the Bajoran Orb of Time. (If that name sounds hilariously generic, well, just wait for the scene when Kira casually masters the orb's seemingly magical properties by just opening and closing its box.) While orbiting the planet, they also pick up an apparent stray, a human named Barry Waddle (Charlie Brill). One terrific gag about Worf's smell later, and the *Defiant* finds itself hurled back to the 23rd century. "Barry," it turns out, isn't actually "Barry." Nor is he a human being. His real name is Arne Darwin, and he's a Klingon who's been genetically altered to appear human, all to pull off the scheme that drove the story of the original "Trouble With Tribbles" episode. Why Arne never bothered to get his looks altered back to normal isn't explicitly explained, but Worf does say his failure to defeat Kirk made him an outcast among his own kind, so... you do the math.

DS9 has brought back cast members from the original show before, and Brill's appearance is a canny way to give the whole hour a feeling of continuity; conceptually, it's even more effective than the use of digitally altered footage from the original episode. Strangely, though, the script doesn't make all that much use of him. He's only in two scenes, and while Brill does fine by the dialogue he's given, the character has about as much depth as the orb that starts all this nonsense in the first place. It's not a major flaw, but it does show how much the episode is depending on our good will towards its premise. If you don't particularly care for the original series. If you don't like watching the modern cast goofing around and playing hooky from all the seriousness of the Dominion War, you aren't going to find much else to occupy your time.

Thankfully, I dug it. As a critic, I wouldn't have minded a tighter script, but as a fan, I was mostly just enjoying the goofy grin on my face from beginning to end. The homage is played lightly; there are a few comments about how great Kirk is, and Sisko makes a point of meeting the captain before he and his crew travel back to the present, but this isn't some breathless eulogy for a bygone age. When Dax expresses enthusiasm for an old tricorder design, there's a joke built into the tribute. "Trials And Tribble-ations" is as much about fandom as it is about time travel. For the run of the episode, Dax and Sisko and the others are as much breathless, captivated enthusiasts as they are protagonists with a job to do, and that sense of shared joy easily overcomes the plot's minor inadequacies. Dax gets to speak rapturously about Spock's devastating attractiveness and mention how she slept with McCoy in a previous life. Plus she loves the uniforms. It's hard not to cheer for that.

As for the effects work that blends new characters into the old, it works well enough. Sometimes you can see the seams, especially in the close ups, but perfection in special effects is never as important as our willingness to accept the illusion; and the enthusiasm that drives all of this makes the occasional fuzziness easy to ignore. The bar fight is as fun as it was in its original form, and the few times we see Kirk, Spock, and others (and if I'm remembering right, all of the main *Enterprise* crew from "The Trouble With Tribbles" is on screen at some point, even if our heroes don't interact with all of them) make sure all those shots of long corridors and rebuilt sets seem utterly authentic. And hell, the attention to set design and detail is terrific. This is the bright side of fan-service, folks; briefly indulged with care, wit, and craft.

In the end, everything turns out as it should. Arne's plan is foiled when Sisko and Dax are able to find the tribble with a bomb inside, and the Temporal Investigators are appeased that nothing drastic was altered or brought back to the present. There's only one slight drawback. As befits an episode that looks to mimic *TOS*, "Trials And Tribble-ations" ends with a button joke, this time in the form of a promenade full of the small, furry aliens which give both episodes their names. When the *Defiant* returned to the present, there was a tribble on board, and now the aliens have infested the station. And so we end with a shot that gives you something you didn't even know you wanted: Quark, frowning stoically, surrounded by small, cooing balls of fur. And he thought root beer was bad.

Stray observations:

- I didn't mention all the jokes, mainly because that would've doubled the length of the review, but Worf's stoic "We do not discuss it with outsiders," re: the forehead ridges, is the sort of perfect lamp-shade hanging of a joke that makes you proud to pay attention to continuity. (Worf's revelation that tribbles are considered an enemy of the Klingon empire is also great.)
- O'Brien and Bashir are teamed up for most of the episode, and it's as great as you'd imagine. I especially liked O'Brien's awed horror when looking over the insides of the *Enterprise's* machinery, and his glee about lying to Kirk after the bar fight.
- Bashir gets a "I'm a doctor, not a [something that is not a doctor]" line in, which is nice. Oh, and he also briefly entertains the thought that he was destined to be his own ancestor when he bumps into an attractive ensign on the elevator. Ah, the sexy, sexy perils of time travel.

Next week: Things get heavy again with "Let He Who Is Without Sin..." and we take another jaunt back in time with "Things Past."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Let He Who Is Without Sin...”/“Things Past”[Zack Handlen](#)[4/18/13 10:00AM](#)**“Let He Who Is Without Sin...” (season five, episode seven; originally aired 11/11/1996)***In which Worf goes to Risa and has terrible time...*

I didn’t go to a lot of parties in college. But I wasn’t a complete outcast, and by my senior year, I actually managed to develop a decent-sized social group. This was a mixed blessing; on the one hand, it meant I didn’t feel quite so alone; on the other, I had more opportunities to emotionally wound or embarrass people who cared about me. But either way, that meant more parties. I never quite got the hang of parties, but I liked the idea of them, and most passed in a sort of general, mildly intoxicated, moderately belligerent blur. Once, someone might have talked me into starting a fight club. It was a weird time.

Anyway, the reason I bring this up is, at this one party I went to, there was woman my age—let’s call her Sarah. Sarah was a little crazy (she joined a cult for a while after she graduated), and she had this habit of stripping down in public when she got drunk. Actually, I don’t know if she was drunk or not, but I’m thinking probably? She was a big believer in being free and the beauty of the human body and what not. And she was cute, if that’s important. So at this party I’m at, she and her boyfriend decide what the hell, they’re going to take off their clothes in the living room, and I decide I’m going to be in the other room while this happens. Sarah notices me leave, and she follows me, shouting (cheerfully) at me about the aforementioned beauty of the naked whatnot. I want to stress, she wasn’t

romantically interested in me; this wasn't some weird mindfuck she was doing on her boyfriend, or whatever. Sarah was just super cheerful and kind of messed up and convinced everybody should see her naked. And it made me incredibly uncomfortable. Seeing a cute young woman completely naked should, theoretically, be a pleasant thing for a straight guy like myself. It was not. There was a repulsiveness to the experience, not because of anything specific about her, but just the shock of it, of being forced to deal with someone else's openness when I didn't want to.

All of which is just to say: I get where Worf is coming from here. At least, I should get it. Risa, the pleasure planet first mentioned on [*Star Trek: The Next Generation*](#), seems like it could be a nightmare of bad boundary issues if you aren't ready for it. "Let He Who Is Without Sin..." does its best to make it look like the place is heaven for anybody but the squarest of squares, but Worf's refusal to put on an embarrassing swimsuit and enjoy the general fuckery shouldn't make him a monster. People have good times in different ways, and deeply private individuals shouldn't be shamed by extroverts because they don't want to go along with the crowd. I'm not sure that's enough content for an entire episode of *DS9* (it sounds like something better suited to a kid's show), but it's not an inherently broken concept. But instead, we get "Worf is a big old grump who gets super into this dreary conservative movement and threatens his relationship with Dax and is also kind of creepily controlling and vaguely psychologically abusive, before it all gets resolved in the quickest, laziest way imaginable." Also, Bashir and Leeta break up, and apparently everyone on Bajor is super well-adjusted, because they have to go through a ritual to end their relationship. And Quark is there, because... I don't know, really, but he gets a few funny lines. Vanessa Williams shows up, and doesn't really have a homoerotic vibe with Dax. Also, the clothes. Sweet zombie Jeebus, the clothes.

The major problem right off the bat is the problem all modern *Treks* seem to have with sexiness: They're terrible at it. I've never been able to pinpoint why. Maybe it's because everything seems so easy and low-key. (Which says something horrible about my brain, I guess.) The clothes are definitely a factor. It's like watching softcore porn with the porn part cut out, and it rarely, if ever, has any heat behind it. Risa is supposed to be a kind of new, and extremely smutty, Eden, and we're supposed to be invested in its survival. But watching people have low-stress fun isn't really conducive to drama, and apart from a certain "I guess I wouldn't mind getting groped by a Sears swimsuit model" escapism, Risa isn't a very interesting place. It lacks specificity: The show's idea of a perfect vacation spot is at once disappointingly narrow (frolic! fuck! frolic! fuck! play some made up sports game! frolic-fuck!) and tediously vague, just a lot of generalized cliches that never crystallize into anything with dramatic potential. Williams' character Arandis, the chief facilitator who literally fucked Curzon Dax to death, is just a well-meaning stewardess. It's not that Williams is bad in the role; there's just no role to be bad in.

But Risa isn't meant to be much more than a symbol anyway, a staging ground for Dax and Worf to work through their relationship problems in a theoretically thrilling fashion. It goes about as well as you'd expect: We learn in the cold open back on *DS9* that Worf is jealous of Dax for having lunch with one of her former lovers (with a see-through skull), and generally upset with Dax's openness about their personal lives. This is handled lightly, although it's clear the two have issues they need to

seriously discuss; those issues become more prominent over the course of the episode, as Worf's frustration ultimately drives him to align himself (however briefly) with a fringe group calling themselves the Essentialists. The Essentialists are obsessed with returning the Federation back to the "old way," and their leader, Pascal Fullerton, sees Risa as a symbol of all that is soft and weak-willed about modern times. Given Worf's love of routine, security, and discipline, it's not surprising that he'd be drawn to the group, especially given how much Risa's charms make him into an outsider. Plus, the more he and Dax struggle to work through their problems, the more it seems like those problems are unsolvable, driving Worf to take action that, in a different context, he might not have.

There are some possibly fruitful ideas buried under all of this, but unfortunately, "Let He Who Is Without Sin..." is a mess from the title on down. Apart from the slight but pleasant Bashir and Leeta plot (the optimism about how relationships end in the future is almost charming in its naïveté), this is all Worf and Dax yelling at each other, and it's frustrating to watch. The Essentialists are such a light gloss on the stereotypical concept of a conservative advocacy group that they're barely even a metaphor, and Fullerton's sneering, condescending conviction seems so out of place in our conception of the Federation that it's hard to reconcile it with the rest of the show. Which isn't to say there isn't a place for disparate views, and *DS9*'s writers have always been interested in showing the various downsides of a seemingly utopian hegemony. But the Essentialists aren't given the dignity of a complex perspective. They're just straw men set up so that Worf can learn a valuable lesson about whatever. Yes, there are cartoonishly simplistic protest movements in the real world, but great storytelling exists to increase our empathy, not decrease it; these guys are just hanging out waiting for Captain Planet to show up and lecture them.

Really, though, that's not the worst part. Neither is Risa's terminal blandness. What really makes this hour hard to watch is how it hard it works to destroy the Dax and Worf relationship under the guise of developing it. That relationship had potential, and I'll hold out hope that it will improve in the future, but as is, these two people are not suited for each other in any way. Dax is easy-going, mischievous, and open to new experiences. Worf is none of those things. His attempts to dictate her behavior would be unbearable if they were aimed at someone with less of a will to resist, and even as it is, he comes across as a domineering prick. Fiction often likes to suggest that opposites attract, if for no other reason than opposites attracting allows for terrific storytelling potential; but while that sort of thing can happen in real life, it's rare for it to be the basis of a lasting, healthy romance. Dax and Worf share a love of Klingon ritual, and a clear physical attraction, but this episode underlines again and again that they want very different things out of life. If Dax really understood Worf and cared about him, why the hell would she take him to the one planet in the universe least suited to his personality? And if Worf cared for Dax, why wouldn't he make even a token effort to enjoy himself, or at least try and communicate why he was so uncomfortable?

Ah, but I'm forgetting Worf's big speech, where he reveals the secret magical key that explains all his dickish behavior. See, when Worf was younger, he got overzealous during a game of soccer, and accidentally killed another kid. That's bizarre, and it sort of justifies his emphasis on restraint and order, I guess. But it comes out of left field, and the attempt to use tragedy as a kind of code-word

cipher to unravel the mystery of our favorite Klingon's behavior is baldly manipulative. Being emotionally reserved isn't the same as being deeply distrustful of the passions of others, and Worf has certainly not shown much reluctance to apply violence to problems in the past. (This is the guy who blew up a ship last season before bothering to check if it was the ship he was aiming for, after all.) Michael Dorn delivers the monologue well, and it certainly helps soften him a little, but it's such an obvious attempt to explain why he is the way he is that it's ultimately more distracting than effective.

It's telling how, three-fourths of the way through the hour, after Worf has handed over the planet's environmental controls to the Essentialists (or at least told them that's what they should target; I guess if he'd actually be involved with their little terrorism game, he'd have to deal with actual consequences), Bashir and Quark ask Dax what she sees in Worf. She gives a little speech about how deep down he's wonderful, and you can believe it or not as you see fit. The important bit is that Worf is given no such speech. It's supposed to be obvious why he's attracted to Dax—she is, after all, hot, and I guess maybe there's some other stuff? There's an assumption that because the writers have decided to put these two characters together, it should just automatically make sense, and, what's worse, that the assumption itself doesn't need to be justified. Worf's attraction to Dax (he treats her like you'd treat an annoying but moderately sexy co-worker) doesn't need to come from anything. Every scene they share together seems to be some kind of a mistake, two bullheaded people forcing their way through a bad idea. Worf is a challenging character to write for, given that his natural tendencies are at odds with what we usually like seeing in stories, but he can work, and he's a solid addition to the cast. But this episode seems to go out of its way to make him a close-minded ass. It should be easy to root for Worf in this kind of situation: In his way, he's the social misfit, the outcast, the nerd at the cool party. Instead, everybody comes off as tiresome. The social commentary is practically non-existent, and in the end, everything's supposed to be okay again. I will accept this, insofar as it means the episode is finally over.

Stray observations:

- Oh, and Leeta is into Rom now. Which... fine, whatever.
- Odo is amused that the O'Briens are going to name their son "Sean," which means "swamp" in Bajoran.
- "I do trust you. I do not trust Captain Boday."—Worf, being a tool. (Not trusting Boday means, what, he thinks Boday is going to hit on Dax? And that Dax is somehow going to be powerless to resist her ex's charms? Unless Worf suspects Boday of being a potential rapist, not trusting the captain is denying Dax agency and not trusting her.)
- "All is ours, is yours."—a Risan, being hella creepy.
- "Arandis was Curzon's lover, not mine."—Dax, apparently forgetting the time she was willing to go into exile to be with one of her symbiote's former flames.
- Alexander Siddig is really skinny.

“Things Past” (season five, episode eight; originally aired 11/18/1996)*In which Odo isn't perfect...*

We want to believe in people. We want to find someone and say he or she is a hero, a symbol of all that's good in the world, someone we can put our unquestioning faith in; here is someone who will always do the right thing. This is a natural, understandable impulse. It's also a bad idea, and it's the sort of bad idea we're rarely willing to confront. The ideas of “good” and “evil” are abstract concepts, and people are not abstract, no matter how much we might pretend otherwise. It might hurt a little to realize that our idols had selfish thoughts at some point, that they fucked around from time to time, that they could be mean or dumb, but if we're unwilling to accept this, we're setting ourselves up for injury down the line. Being inspired by someone can and should be powerful, but worshipping them requires turning a blind eye to the vagaries of human behavior. It means pretending that an individual can stand up to an ideal; and then, when the pretense fails, acting as though it's the individual's fault, and not an inherent flaw in our way of thinking.

Odo isn't the sort of person to feel comfortable on a pedestal, but apparently, that's where the Bajorans have decided to put him. It's only mentioned briefly in the episode's cold open, but it drives the rest of the story, leading to a devastating final scene between Odo and Kira back on the station. Odo, it seems, is seen as a voice for pure, undiluted justice. Even though he served as security chief on the station during the Cardassian occupation, his time there is viewed as above reproach—the Cardassians may have been vicious bastards, but Odo served a higher purpose. At least, that's what the Bajorans want to believe. It's such a nice idea, really. Even with the shifting political situation, the corruption, the fascism, the forced mining, the Kafkaesque legal system, the hopelessness, Odo was a constant. He stood for something apart from the petty infighting of the mere solids around him. And even with the Cardassians gone, Odo is still on the station, still doing his job. It's a comfort to think there are some things can exist outside of politics.

Except, that's not really true, and “Things Past” once again puts Odo through the ringer to show even he can be compromised. And this time, it's not his Changeling family running the torment, but a minor plasma storm that just happens to set off the few Changeling cells still lingering in Odo's system. (“Lingering” may be bad choice of words here; Bashir doesn't suggest that Odo is going to return to his former self anytime soon, but the revelation that he isn't completely solid does have some hope to it.) It's a great explanation, because it means there's no conspiracy or guiding mind behind what happens beyond Odo's own guilt—the storm zaps the cells, the cells try and create a Great Link, and they simply latch onto whomever happens to be nearby. In this case, that's Dax, Sisko, and Garak. Sure, as justifications go, it's a bit of a hand wave, but it's plausible enough to accept on face value, and it makes sure the dramatic center of the episode stays where it should be: on Odo, and his guilt.

Narratively, that guilt doesn't come into focus until late in the hour, but Odo's horror at finding himself back on Terek Nor makes it clear from the start that he's hiding something. That's another reason to enjoy “Things Past.” Typically, time-travel stories deal in practicalities: don't change the timeline, how do we escape, etc. But while Sisko immediately starts looking for a way out of their situation, it's

obvious straight off that this isn't a typical time-travel adventure. For one thing, none of our heroes actually look like themselves in the past. To others, they appear as Bajorans, and even more critical, they appear as specific Bajorans. Garak's able to hack into the station's security system, and he discovers that each one of them has an identity corresponding to a specific, presumably historical, individual. Garak ID's Sisko and himself, but Odo knows his "own" name before needing to be told. Which, right there, tells you a lot. Especially when they learn that Thrax (Kurtwood Smith, always a treat), the current security advisor, shouldn't actually be on the station at the time they traveled to. Odo should be in charge, but the past Odo is nowhere to be seen.

To be honest, Sisko and Garak should've figured out what was happening sooner. (Dax spends most of the episode chilling with Gul Dukat, so she has an excuse.) But that's another asset to the story's design: It's just as easy to argue that none of them, apart from Odo, were able to think very clearly. The Great Link isn't something non-Changelings are designed to experience, and while none of our heroes show any obvious signs of muddy thinking, it's not unreasonable to assume their powers of perception are a bit off. "Things Past" starts off like a typical time-travel tale, but everything is just a little skewed, and that skewed quality is exaggerated as the story progresses. The tension here isn't "Will Sisko and the others escape?", although the script maintains that illusion for a good part of the running time. The tension is whatever Odo's keeping hidden, and even that's not exactly a secret. This episode isn't really about suspense or present conflict. It's just a very clever, effective way of delivering a flashback, and reminding us (and Odo) of how the past is never as far away as we'd like it to be.

There are flaws, though. Given the static nature of the situation, it makes sense that Odo is going to be the center of interest; the episode tries to hide this as long as it can, but that doesn't make the non-Odo scenes easier to take. Watching Bashir poke around uselessly in Sick Bay isn't particularly illuminating, not even the feint toward a threat when we see that Garak's nose in the "real world" is bleeding after he gets struck by a Cardassian guard in the past. Simply staying in the past until the end of the story would've been far more effective, given that the disorientation and mystery of what was happening are the main initial hooks. Every time you see everyone lying unconscious on the station, it reminds you that this is all in their heads, and that erodes the immediacy. But then, if you got rid of the Bashir scenes, you'd have to find more for Sisko, Garak, Dax, and Odo to do on Terek Nor, and that has its own difficulties. As it is, Dax's scenes with Gul Dukat are fine, but far from essential. It's strange to have her sidelined from the action for so long, especially since Dukat isn't relevant to Odo's story. He brings Dax back to his quarters because he wants a friend, they chat a bit, Dax is nearly killed in an explosion targeting Dukat, and then she knocks Dukat out in an escape attempt. Sure, Dukat's speech about considering the Bajorans as his "children" is creepily in-character, but it's not anything new. Mostly, these scenes exist to try and distract us from Odo's increasing desperation. It's a trick, and not a very effective one.

Dosn't really matter, though. The last act, as Odo finally comes to terms with what he's being forced to relive, is powerful enough to overcome the minor padding. The story is fairly simple: While Odo was serving as security chief on Terek Nor, there was an assassination attempt on Dukat's life. In his rush to judgement, Odo accused a trio of recent Bajoran arrivals on the station. The Bajorans were executed

on the Promenade, and it was only later than Odo discovered he'd been wrong; they were innocent, and he was responsible for their deaths. Given how much value Odo puts in upholding the law, it's no wonder that he's kept this a secret from the others, and you have to wonder how much of it was just rash assumption, and how much of his mistake was driven by a need to fit in, to deliver what the Cardassians wanted him to deliver. His desperation as he argues with Thrax is all the more affecting when you realize he's essentially arguing with himself, and that it's an argument he can never hope to win. What's done is done, no matter how much he regrets his actions, and no matter how much shame they cause him in the present. And now his sins are exposed to everyone.

Which brings us to the last scene, which helps to bring everything into focus. As much as Odo values his own self-confidence, Kira's opinion of him must mean nearly as much, if not more; and her belief in his goodness, his righteousness, is shaken by the truth. Odo has ostensibly given up his romantic feelings for Kira, but she's still arguably his dearest friend, and the idea that he's hurt her must be deeply painful for him. It's partly her fault, really. As she tells him, she wanted to believe that he was something better than the rest of them, someone who didn't get his hands dirty during the Occupation, and that means she's bound to be disappointed when he turns out to be more than just a symbol. But then, it's partly Odo's fault too. He's compromised, but more than that, he held himself up as a that symbol Kira wanted so much. We want to believe in people. But just as dangerously, we want people to believe in us.

Stray observations:

- Garak doesn't get a lot to do, but he does it with aplomb. I want a Garak-centric story again, dammit. It's been too long.
- Quark seems to enjoy the Occupation a little too much. It's weird to see him ordering people around on Terek Nor, after his gradual but definite character growth in the present.
- "There's more to life than the rule of law."—Odo. And then, awfully, when Kira asks if these three Bajorans were the only innocents to die under his watch: "I'm not sure. I hope so."

Next week: Odo and Quark must make "The Ascent," and Sisko gets a bad case of "Rapture."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Ascent”/“Rapture”[Zack Handlen](#)[4/25/13 10:00am](#)**“The Ascent” (season five, episode nine; originally aired 11/25/1996)***In which the mountain will not come to Odo and Quark...*

I’m not sure who my favorite character on *DS9* is. The field is too rich, the selections too diverse; and besides, more than any other *Trek* show I’ve watched, these characters belong so entirely to one another that trying to imagine them independently is a fool’s errand. I can, however, tell you my favorite relationship. There are plenty to choose from. I love Sisko and Jake, easily the best parent/child bond the franchise has ever produced. I love O’Brien getting over his initial irritation with Bashir and the two becoming best friends, two grown-ups who bring out the schoolboy in one another. I love Odo and Kira, Kira and Sisko, Dax and everyone, Worf and Odo, Quark and Rom... And so on. All of these relationships are compelling, and they’re all distinct; there’s history and texture to each pairing, and I’m rarely, if ever, disappointed when I learn who’s going to be hanging out with whom this week.

I love all of this. But my favorite is Odo and Quark, for reasons captured by that “The Ascent.”

First and foremost, I can’t think of another relationship on a *Trek* show that’s equivalent to this. Which isn’t to say that all the other interactions on *DS9* are familiar; far from it. But these two together are unique in a way that, say, Jake and Sisko or O’Brien and Bashir aren’t. (The only other pair that comes close is Kira and Sisko, but in a completely different way.) That’s primarily because there’s never been

a regular on a Trek show like Quark before. Odo, as we've discussed, fits into the franchise's love of outsiders trying to reckon with their relationship to humanity. He's different from Spock and Data, but he fits into that tradition, making it his own.

Quark, though? He's new. *Trek* main characters are always some kind of "lawful good" on the D&D morality scale. No matter how frantic things could get on the *Enterprise* of [the original series](#), no one ever pushed that hard; there might be the occasional brush with "chaotic good," but never for very long. And if anything, the folks on [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#) were even more rigid in their morality. Picard was capable of making hard choices, but his commitment to the Prime Directive helped define who he was, and it's hard to imagine him tolerating anyone on board his ship who tried to buck his rule for long. But Quark is complicated. You could say he's "lawful evil," but that doesn't really fit; he's greedy, but his greed comes as much from his culture as from his own needs, and the writers have been mostly successful at keeping him in a kind of gray area that makes you rethink the whole alignment system. He's a rogue, an individual always looking out for his own self-interest, and while he's never as cruel or deviant as an outright villain would be, he's still an antihero, someone whose regular acts of decency or self-sacrifice can still surprise us.

Odo and Quark, then, are new: the law man and the criminal, bound together by circumstance, openly antagonistic, but secretly more dependent on one another than either is willing to admit. The closest analog I can think of in the franchise to this is Spock and McCoy, but in their case, both were on the side of the angels; what's more, the half-Vulcan and the doctor spent time together because of Jim Kirk, and it's hard to imagine the two hanging out without Kirk to bring them together. Odo and Quark are just Odo and Quark. The law is what binds them, but it's something more than that, and by the time we get to "The Ascent," it's clear both characters realize it. Odo and Quark help define each other: If Quark exists, then Odo is a determined Sherlock Holmes, hunting down his man to the bitter end; and if Odo exists, then Quark is the brilliant Moriarty, a criminal mastermind capable of eluding one of the greatest detectives in the universe. Both of them know this is patently untrue (and one of the great parts of this episode is how both characters acknowledge how pathetic they are), but the game keeps them going. So long as no one ever wins.

Plus, there's the fact that neither Odo nor Quark have many non-adversarial friendships. Odo has associates, and he has Kira, and there was occasionally Lwaxana, and that's sort of it; he's not a very sociable kind of guy, although he seems to be lightening up lately. It seems like Quark's life should be filled with people, and yet all we ever really see him doing is annoying the main ensemble, berating his brother, and kowtowing to the Ferengi government. He knows people, sure, but like Odo, his work is his life, and neither he nor the former Changeling have a lot to show for that, prestige-wise. But they have each other to yell at, anyway.

The writers have never bothered to hide that Odo and Quark aren't simply enemies, but at the same time, they don't give in to outright sentimentality. "The Ascent" keeps this trend going. When Odo finds Quark in the cold open, he's practically beaming over the chance to take the Ferengi into custody and deliver him to a grand jury on Inferna Prime. The first quarter of the episode has them trapped in

a shuttle together, getting on each others' nerves and debating the inevitability of Quark's incarceration. Then Quark discovers a bomb, and the shuttle ends up crashing on a nearby, life-sustaining planet. With no sign of civilization, no replicator, and a transmitter that needs higher ground before it can be used effectively, the pair is forced to go for a long, long, long walk; and as food runs low, and freezing temperatures take their toll, tensions rise.

Except things never get as dark as they might have. Sure, Odo and Quark do finally snap and get into a fight that winds up with Odo breaking his leg (solidity can sure suck sometimes, huh?), but once tempers have flared, interactions go back to how they always were: contentious, but never actually hostile. With any other pair from the show in a similar situation, everything would start friendly, but gradually deteriorate. Here, open antagonism has always been a function of the friendship. It's refreshing, in its way, to see two people who have no reason to hold back judgement or irritation. That's another thing their cop/robber dynamic creates: they don't have to pretend to be nice. Odo's whole life has been trying to understand social interaction, while Quark is always trying to keep up a good front to increase profits. When it's just the two of them, though, they can be as sarcastic, as contemptuous, and as irritable as they'd like, because they don't have to pretend to be friends—a fact which somehow loops around and makes them friends. It's neat.

The episode's main story arc (there's a subplot about Jake and Nog moving in together; see stray observations) is familiar enough to set your watch by, and yet that familiarity never becomes tedious or rote. It's enjoyable to watch the heroes (or hero and antihero, I guess) struggle against impossible odds, bickering the whole way, and read between the lines to see the honest affection underneath all that snippiness. There's never any real epiphany moment. Odo doesn't suddenly turn to Quark and say, "You've always been there for me," or something equally foolish; in fact, when it comes time for the constable to dictate what he believes will be his final log, he's still making snide comments about Quark dying further up the path. In the final scene, Quark and Odo, bruised and battered in the *Defiant's* infirmary, and Quark brings up an earlier scene when he told Odo he hated the former Changeling. "I just wanted you to know," Quark says, "I meant every word of it." "So did I," Odo assures him. It would've been easy to break just a little, to have one or the other try and say something more obviously warmhearted, but I can't imagine a more perfect ending. Or a sweeter one.

Stray observations:

- About that Jake and Nog plot: It's cute, and serves as a kind of supplement for the main story, in that it features two characters struggling to cope when circumstances force them into close quarters. The highlight is Nog's sudden conviction that Rom, who's personality has shifted a bit since his acceptance to Starfleet Academy, has to be a Changeling; it's also nice, as ever, to watch Sisko and Jake interact. On the downside, the resolution is so slight as to be almost nonexistent, but everybody ends up happy, so who's complaining.
- Quark brings root beer to Nog's welcome home party. I suspect this is both a gift and a subtle form of protest.

- Quark ended up saving Odo this time around. I suppose this could affect their dynamic in the future, but I doubt it. Just look at the way Odo laughs at the end. Neither he nor Quark is really in denial about the nature of their relationship.
- “I’m not trying to rescue you. I’m taking you along as emergency rations. If you die, I’m gonna eat you.”—Quark
- Quark plays Fizzbin! And Odo reads romance novels!
- At one point, while trying to goad Quark into going on, Odo mentions Sisko, Worf, and Dax as people who would handle a crisis better. It fits back into something they were talking about earlier: they both consider themselves, and each other, losers. And in a way, they are. Quark is a subpar businessman, clever enough to survive but not quite clever enough to get much higher than that, and Odo is a freak who has managed to exile himself from the only place he might’ve truly belonged. We know they’re more than that (Quark does do the right thing in the end, and his struggles to balance Ferengi custom against his burgeoning conscience put him in a good light; Odo is quite simply a hero, tortured past and all), but there’s comfort in being around someone who doesn’t expect you to pretend you’re happy.

“Rapture” (season five, episode 10; originally aired 12/30/1996)

In which Sisko’s always turning back too late...

I’m bipolar. Very mild case, not a big deal, and I’ve been on the same level of medication for years now. But I notice every few weeks or so, the world suddenly gets a lot sharper. I make connections easier, and I come up with more ideas; the sentences I write come to my fingers almost fully formed. Which is great, but the longer this goes on, the faster those connections come, and the more irritated I get with the outside world. Everyone around is me slow, or a distraction. Worst of all, at some point, the speed is so much that I can’t match it with my methods of expression. This is a minor version of manic behavior, and if I weren’t medicated (or if my illness was more severe), I’d mostly likely find myself hugely over-confident, shouting a lot, and generating work that would seem brilliant in my head, but make absolutely no sense to an outsider. But I don’t get that bad. I just get a little wound up, until I start to think I almost have everything right, that I can make the whole world make sense. And then it slips away.

I thought about this some watching “Rapture,” which details Sisko’s efforts to find the fabled lost Bajoran city of B’Hala. For most of the episode, Sisko is in the grip of that sensation that gives the episode its title, providing him with a sort of transcendental clarity and helping him achieve his goals. I’m not the human contact for an ancient alien species (that I know of), and I haven’t been zapped by a holosuite at any point in recent memory, but it’s not hard for me to relate to Sisko’s attempts to describe what he’s feeling. And, much as I love rattling on about myself, I’d bet most everyone has had a time in their lives when they felt, however briefly, that they could find the sense in the universe. It’s just an intensified version of inspiration after all, and while hopefully none of us ever had to deal with

the health problems Sisko struggles with, it's not difficult to empathize with his passion, even as his experience moves beyond us.

I've expressed reservations about Prophet/Emissary-centric episodes before, but this is a good one, I think; the mysticism is grounded enough in practical terms to give the story clear stakes, while still allowing for a sense of the ineffable. It helps that all of the philosophizing comes from Sisko, a character sensible and present enough that, when he starts going off into flights of fancy, those flights have more weight to them than they might otherwise have had. The story is, Sisko becomes entranced with a millennia old painting depicting the lost city of B'Hala. (Dax's polite but uninterested reaction to Kira and Sisko's excitement in the cold open is great.) The painting has a pillar in it with symbols which supposedly map the city's place in the cosmos, but because of the angle of the pillar, half the symbols are missing. But Sisko catches a reflection, and gets an idea, and starts to work in one of Quark's holosuites. Then he gets zapped by the holosuite's computer system, and his brain is "polarized." (Bashir says that word a lot.) Suddenly, his work is easier, and he makes great leaps forward; but he also starts getting these terrible headaches.

If you've ever seen *Phenomenon*, you may have some idea where this is going. The "polarization" grants Sisko amazing insight and peace; instead of avoiding Kasidy Yates when she returns to the station (after serving six months for her work with the Maquis), he embraces her when she comes to see him. It's a small touch, and never underlined, but it's telling. Over and over, Sisko tells people how he's able to understand how everything fits together, how everything matters—which means instead of being bogged down by uncertainty or resentment, he's more willing to reconnect with his loved ones. He seems more at peace, although his determination to find B'Hala borders on obsession. It's good that he's in a positive frame of mind, since the word has come through the Federation is finally going to allow Bajor to sign on, and yet Sisko doesn't seem to care that much. He's reaching for something greater.

Inevitably, conflict arises. As Sisko works on finishing the hat, he spends less and less time at his duties, to the consternation of Admiral Charles Whatley (Ernest Perry Jr.). That's the problem with inspiration: it's almost impossible to explain to the people around you why what you're doing is so important, because so much of what you're experiencing is intuition and passion. That doesn't change the fact that Sisko has a very real job to do, and even after he uncovers B'Hala, he's still putting aside his duties and spending his time staring at the remnants of the city, reaching for something he can't articulate.

The situation only becomes more dire when the headaches get worse, and Bashir determines that Sisko could very well die if he doesn't get treatment for his condition. Sisko refuses the treatment, which upsets Jake and Kasidy. This isn't the most exciting conflict, but the actors manage to sell it. Mainly, it works because of Avery Brooks, who does a fantastic job of selling Sisko's sudden transition from levelheaded station captain to galvanized prophet. Sisko's moments of quiet reflection, and his bursts of passionate, almost-there revelation come across equally well, and intentionally or not, the episode manages to put us more on his side than on the side of his family and friends. While they

want what's best for him, it's impossible to watch Brooks speechify about his visions without wanting to see him follow through, risk to his health be damned. The tension in "Rapture" comes not from concerns over Sisko's safety (it's not like the writers were going to kill him off), but from hoping he'll be able to hold out long enough to get what he needs from his dying brain.

"Rapture" doesn't have much in the way of subplots. The possibility that Bajor will finally join the Federation is one of those things that sounds like a bigger deal than it actually is, even before Sisko's revelations put an end to the proceedings. It's a nice bit of ongoing serialization, though; while Bajor has been interested in signing on since the start of the show, applying for Federation membership is presumably a long, tedious process, so it makes sense that most of it would've happened behind the scenes.

The signing ceremony also means the return of Kai Winn, whose her usual sunshiny self. There's some effort made in the script to try and, well, not redeem her character, exactly, but at least make her less horrible. She apologizes to Kira about having once doubted Sisko's role as the Emissary, and later, she gets a monologue about how much she suffered during the Cardassian occupation, accusing Kira and her fellow revolutionaries of not taking Winn's struggles seriously. Louise Fletcher is excellent as always, and she delivers the monologue well, but it doesn't land; like Worf's dead-soccer-boy speech, it's too obviously a ploy meant to make us react a certain way. I doubt any of the writers really believed Winn's complaint would make her totally sympathetic, but there is the sense that the anger she shows to Kira is a righteous anger, and that doesn't really play. It's too simplistic, and too late.

Ultimately, Sisko decides to commune with the Orb of Prophecy, and in doing so, he gets what he needs: the understanding that the visions he's been seeing are a warning that it's too soon for Bajor to join the Federation. So he stumbles into the ceremony and manages to block the signing. Then he collapses, passes out, and Jake gives Bashir permission to perform the surgery, much to Sisko's eventual dismay. The despondency in Brooks' voice when he wakes up and realizes what has happened is very convincing, and helps keep this from being too neat and tidy. At first, it seems odd that Sisko disrupts the entrance ceremony without any repercussions from the Federation, but as the Admiral points out, the Bajorans value their Emissary so highly, it's not like Starfleet could replace him without serious repercussions. It's still a little neat and tidy, especially for a storyline with such cosmic ambitions, but honestly, I'm just relieved to have Sisko back to normal again. Whenever I find my thinking has slowed back down, and the work comes a bit harder, I'm disappointed. But it's still good to know where the ground is.

Stray observations:

- Huzzah for Kasidy Yates! She's mostly a spectator this time around, but it's good to have her on the show again.
- At one point, Sisko wanders through a crowd of Bajorans and answers unasked questions about their lives. If he ever wanted to ignore the Emissary part of his job, I think that's a lost cause now.

- How great is Brooks? He sells this line: “The baby that I’m holding in my hands now is the universe. I need time to study its face.”

Next week: We get a longer overdue Kira episode with “The Darkness And The Light,” and Odo adopts in “The Begotten.”

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Darkness And The Light”/“The Begotten”[Zack Handlen](#)[5/02/13 10:00AM](#)**“The Darkness and the Light” (season 5, episode 11; originally aired 1/6/1997)***In which Kira realizes that terrorism makes some people unhappy...*

Way back in the first season, Kira was the go-to character for complex dramatic storylines. As a former resistance fighter with an ambiguous relationship with Sisko and the Federation he represented, Kira allowed for commentary on the violence of the past, the cost of progress, and how some scars will never be healed. It didn't hurt that Nana Visitor took to the role with gusto. But as the show developed, and its ensemble came into its own, Kira became less of a focal point; and while that was a good sign overall, I find myself missing her storylines, and wishing she had more to do than hang out in ops, or serve as back-up on a raid. Admittedly, Kira's surrogate pregnancy hasn't helped much, as her condition severely limits her mobility and the amount the writers are willing to put her in danger. (At least, that's what I assumed, although this episode goes some lengths to pretend otherwise.) That might be the whole reason for her fading into the background, though. Maybe the writers have run out of things to say about the occupation, the resistance, and what comes next.

“The Darkness And The Light” will not disabuse anyone of this notion. It's not terrible: Visitor is her usual excellent self, the mystery is compelling, and there are the usual small but welcome character touches that help make the station feel like a home. But the script is sloppy, and the central point—that Bajoran rebels who fought against the Cardassians weren't always judicious in picking their targets—feels like something we've seen before. There's something a little tired, a little familiar about

the whole thing, and here, that familiarity isn't to the episode's benefit. If you ignore Worf and Kira's bulging belly (and, okay, the herbs Kira is taking for her pregnancy that save her life), there's nothing here that would've been much out of place in the show's first or second seasons. In that context, this could've been a minor classic, or at least another promising sign of *DS9*'s upward swing. In the fifth season, it's decent, but disappointing, squandering a couple of minor characters and moderate suspense for nothing in particular.

A minor, but nagging problem: the plotting of this is off, as though the writers keep forgetting the show exists in a larger universe. Kira learns from Odo that Latha Mabrin, one of the members of her resistance cell during the occupation, has been killed while in prayer. She then gets a garbled, untraceable recording of a voice saying, "That's one." Very creepy, but all right, there's no need to jump the gun and assume some sort of conspiracy. But Latha's death was only the beginning. Trentin Fala, a servant who used to pass information to the resistance, contacts Kira to tell her she's afraid for her life, and Kira sends Dax and Worf to go beam her off Bajor. Unfortunately, the assassin saw this coming, and planted a small device on Trentin's skin that causes the transporter to rip her to pieces. Some time later, Kira gets another garbled message, this time on a padd Quark found in a shipment of Saurian brandy: "That's two."

At this point, the sensible choice would be to contact the remaining members of the cell and warn them of the danger. At the very least, Kira might consider getting in touch with her boyfriend Shakaar (I wasn't sure if they were still dating, but he pops up in the next episode). She doesn't do this. She gets upset, she accepts the additional security from Odo, and she waits, brooding over her inability to save her friends' lives. It's a small omission, and one that could've been fixed easily enough, but the lapse makes the episode feel strangely weightless. Fala's death is shocking, but the only characters to die who have any meaning for the audience are Lupaza and Furel, whom we first met last season when Kira was trying to negotiate for Kai Winn. The two show up on the station, bust into Kira's quarters, and offer their help, before getting sucked into space off screen. Neither character was hugely important to the series, but without any visceral connection to their execution, the loss is empty, a forced attempt to generate pathos. Kira's shock and horror over what happens makes sense, but the audience doesn't get to relate to her emotions, which robs the story of much of its power.

It also leaves more time to question how much all of this makes sense. Even looking past Kira's (and Odo's) refusal to warn the rest of the potential targets, or make any kind of concentrated effort to ask the others who might be trying to kill them, "The Darkness And The Light" is shaky. The assassin's ability to target his prey borders on omniscient, but hey, this is a science fiction show, and it's good to have a bad guy (or seriously tormented murderer) who can pose a severe threat. Far more irritating is the ease with which Kira tracks the killer down. Now, to cut everyone some slack, it makes sense that the Cardassian responsible for the attacks (a horribly maimed ex-servant named Silarin Prin) would want Kira to track him down eventually. He's doing this in part to torment her—which, come to think, I'm not sure why that is. Apart from the fact that Kira is a main character on the show, what sets her apart from Shakaar and the others? It's not like Lupaza and Furel were getting creepy messages. But still: Prin is trying to mess with Kira's mind, and the end game is her death. So, theoretically, he

could've made himself easier for her to track. But this isn't mentioned. Instead, we get a (very cool) scene of Kira beaming herself in to Odo's office, stealing his list of suspects, and then just stumbling on the right one on her first try. Sure, she eliminates three people before she finds Prin, but Odo said the list was 25 names long. This isn't episode-killing, but it is some half-assed plotting, and something that wouldn't have been at all difficult to fix.

But putting aside all the holes and the nitpicks, the reason "The Darkness And The Light" never gets beyond "decent" is that the premise never makes the necessary step beyond the obvious. Kira's terror at watching the people she cares about die is well done, and her monologue about the first time she joined the resistance is well done, and beautifully staged. (She's in the infirmary, lying on her side, after Lupaza and Furel's deaths; Odo comes in to speak with her, and she just starts telling him about how she grew up wanting to help, and how scared she was that when the time came, she'd let everyone down.) That speech also ties in with Prin's accusation that the resistance didn't care who was hurt, as long as they were Cardassian. Kira talks about firing and firing because all that mattered to her was doing her part, and who knows if she took the time to think about what she was doing, or if she looked that closely at who she was aiming at.

But there's just something missing here, and none of Prin's crazy monologues and attempted torture really makes up for it. Yes, the work of Kira and her friends wasn't always clean, and she had to commit herself completely or else she wouldn't have been able to do what she felt needed to be done. This is ground we've covered before, but it still has some potential. It's just that this story ends when things are about to get interesting, at least from a character perspective. Prin actually has some justification for his crimes, and while that doesn't make him a hero, it at least prevents this from being a simple case of black and white. But just as we learn this information, just as we realize Prin was driven mad by his injuries, and his losses, Kira escapes his trap and kills him. There was tension in the earlier murders, but tension is just a starting point. A great hour of *DS9* finds ways to warp that tension around, and force you to question who you're rooting for, and what you're rooting for. "The Darkness And The Light" never gets there. It's possible to read Kira's grim expression at the end as either a refusal to admit any culpability, or horror over the echoes from her past. There are questions worth investigating. But the story's over before anyone has a chance to ask them.

Stray observations:

- I realize the extreme circumstances, and that Kira has every right to make her own decisions, but her willingness to put herself at risk while carrying the O'Briens' baby wasn't her finest hour. More than anything else, this plays like a sign that the writers are sick of pregnant Kira, and choose to ignore the situation rather than deal with it directly. Thankfully, the next episode will make the issue moot.
- Speaking of the O'Briens, I guess Miles and Kira are okay again? Because Keiko is gone to Earth, which leaves the two of them alone in the apartment.

- “Sometimes innocence is just an excuse for the guilty.” I get the intention of the line, but it’s awful just the same, a kind of Doublespeak way avoiding discussion. Which makes me wonder if this episode wasn’t meant to take a harder stance on Kira’s position (Ron Moore wrote the script based on a story by Bryan Fuller, and it reminds me a little of *Battlestar Galactica*, when Adama or Roslin would make hard choices that we weren’t necessarily supposed to agree with), but didn’t follow through.
- Shakaar knew Kira when she was 13 and he was old enough to lead a resistance cell. That’s—well, it’s not really gross or anything, but it does point to a certain tendency in Kira’s relationships.

“The Begotten” (season 5, episode 12; originally aired 1/27/1997)

In which Odo adopts...

This shouldn’t work. It’s soon, for one thing. Odo has been a solid for all of twelve episodes, and while the season has spent some time establishing what it’s like for the former Changeling to deal with his new status, there’s still more room to explore. Losing his ability to shape shift is the sort of huge, painful transition that could change a character’s entire bearing, and Rene Auberjonois and the writers have done an excellent job indicating all the small ways Odo is adapting (and struggling to adapt) to his new circumstance. He smiles more now than he ever used to, I think, and he drinks more. He’s a bit more visibly emotional, a bit more depressed, probably a bit more self-loathing. These are changes that make sense, and I was looking forward to seeing how those changes would deepen over time. There was always the possibility that Odo would be restored to his former self, but I assumed we’d have more time. But at the end of “The Begotten,” the injured baby Changeling Odo has been caring for is dying, and as its final gift, the creature merges with its adopted father and gives Odo back himself.

This shouldn’t work. But it does.

Maybe the writers decided there was only so much material to be gained from Odo-as-a-human. (After all, it’s not like there aren’t plenty of solids on board DS9 already.) Maybe they decided to subvert expectations and give the poor constable a win after so much losing. Whatever the reason, “The Begotten” is a lovely meditation on parenting and learning to accept the flaws in your own upbringing. The final twist is at once completely unexpected, and fundamentally sound, and while it’s easy to wonder at what might have been if Odo was forced to put on his pants one leg at a time just a little bit longer, it’s hard to begrudge such a satisfying, moving resolution. The most important factor in justifying Odo’s “cure” was that it felt earned, and not just a factor of the writers deciding they missed all those cheesy morphing effects. This passes that test, with flying (heh) colors.

Of course, that’s not the only storyline in “The Begotten.” Kira finally gives birth, which turns out to be a complicated process involving lots of gonging and relaxation rituals. This is played for laughs, and, thankfully, doesn’t take up a lot of the running time; the biggest joke is how Shakaar and O’Brien keep

squabbling for their place in the delivery room. O’Brien thinks he has every right to watch the baby crowning, and Shakaar is uncomfortable at another man seeing his girlfriend’s vagina, which you’d think would be more Kira’s decision, but I guess she’s busy being chill. (Bajorans have to be completely relaxed to give birth, which sounds terribly stressful.) It’s all very sitcom-esque, provided you overlook the fact that the mother-to-be is giving birth to a baby of a different species that was transplanted into her womb after an awful space ship crash. Shakaar barely registers, and there’s no real emotional payoff to the delivery, just another generic, “Oh, the miracle of life!” moment in the middle of a lot of goofiness. (The goofiness isn’t all that funny either.) The only real emotional beat in the whole arc is Kira telling Odo at the end how much she wishes she’d been giving birth to a child of her own; it makes you realize how little the writers have been interested in getting into the reality of this experience, especially since Kira’s confession largely exists so she and Odo can bond over the dead Changeling child.

But hey, at least that arc is over. The really important part of “The Begotten” has Odo buying a sick Changeling from Quark, who found the thing in its bottle as part of a shipment of Saurian Brandy. Still struggling with his current biological stasis, Odo takes to the creature at once, asking Bashir’s help in curing it (radiation poisoning), and then showing the “baby” around the station. Grumpy characters who melt in the face of children (literally in this case) are an old idea, but Odo’s enthusiasm and warmth are a joy to watch. It’s rare to see him so utterly open, and it points to yet another justification for his usual stoicism: deep down, Odo is just a big softy, and softies have to put up a good front to avoid injury. But now that he’s found someone who truly understands what it was like to grow up as a shape-shifter, someone who allows him the opportunity to re-engage with a part of his life he thought lost forever, Odo is just a big old puddle of goo. Figuratively speaking, of course.

His discovery doesn’t go unnoticed, however. The Dominion War is still brewing, so as soon as Sisko learns about the new Changeling, he reports the information to Starfleet. The word gets back to Dr. Mora, and in spite of Odo’s wishes, his old mentor/tormentor/surrogate father arrives on the station, excited to assist in the new Changeling’s upbringing.

The show has dealt with Odo’s resentment towards Mora before, and it is a potent subject. Children often grow up to resent their parents, particularly when those parents are excessively demanding or borderline abusive. Odo is no exception, and given that he spent his early years in a lab, being poked and prodded by a scientist who didn’t initially grasp that the substance in the beaker was a life-form, he has some cause for resentment. And yet Mora refuses to apologize for his behavior, and what makes the conflict so compelling is that the script doesn’t take a side. It’s easier to agree with Odo, given that he’s a main character, and also given that he’s so intent on a no-shouting, nurturing form of parenting; but while Mora’s use of pain as a motivator makes him appear cold and clinical, he’s undeniably passionate about his work, and clearly fond of Odo. More, he has a point. The Changeling needs a push, a reason to start forming shapes. Otherwise it’s content to simply bask in Odo’s warmth. But while Odo eventually gives in to Mora’s advice, it’s clear that his own approach to bonding with the creature also helped in the baby Changeling’s development. The balance between the two men

was necessary to achieve progress, and recognizing that balance allows Odo to accept, and even forgive, how he himself was treated.

Even past the philosophical implications, the education of the baby Changeling is pretty damn delightful; while Odo has talked about his process as a shapeshifter before, this is the first time we've seen that beginning steps of that process laid out in concrete terms. It's a different kind of tension than the show usually goes for, because the stakes aren't that high: will the goo become a cube isn't life-or-death. But that doesn't mean it's not important, both in terms of deciding which parenting method "works," and simply because we want to see Odo get his wish. We want that baby to succeed. The creature doesn't get much in the way of a personality, but that isn't detrimental to our emotional investment. There's something alien about the process that still feels familiar, even universal: struggling to make a connection to a creature that isn't yet capable of returning the effort. And when the Changeling finally does begin to shift, and even goes so far as to mimic Odo's face, the payoff is tremendous. On an intellectual level, it's not hard to realize that the baby will have to respond eventually, but emotionally, that puddle of goo (at one point, Odo's carrying it around in a mug, which seems like it could lead to a horrible confusion) is just, well, goo. When it finally transforms into a visibly living being, the surprise is nearly as strong for us as it is for the characters.

And then the poor thing up and dies. It's a potentially unbearable bleak twist, especially in the face of Odo's joy; after he and Mora's first success, the constable gets drunk and even spends time in Quark's bar after hours, while Quark struggles to understand what's going on. It's no secret that Odo has been on a bit of a bad streak of late, and to see him finally happy, only to have the source of that happiness taken away, would've gone past drama and come perilously close to the realm of narrative sadism. At the same time, I'm not sure keeping a Changeling baby around on the station would've worked long term; the creature's presence would've required a significant shift in focus for Odo's character, and those can be difficult to pull off. And having Starfleet take the child off Odo's hands would've been a tough sell, because it's hard to imagine Odo willingly letting the baby go. So it was reasonable to expect there'd be some kind of permanent conclusion to the storyline, but when the news came out that the Changeling baby was dying (the radiation damage was too severe for Bashir to have cleansed all of it), I figured Odo would make a trip into Dominion territory and try and return the creature to its home.

Instead, the Changeling absorbs itself into Odo, and Odo gets his powers back. It doesn't feel like a cheat either. The moment is a complete surprise, and that helps; there was no telegraphing that this was even possible before it happened, and yet, given what we know about the Great Link, in retrospect it doesn't seem like that much of a stress. More importantly, the shot of Odo utterly astonished, shifting out of his clothes and flying across the Promenade as a hawk is so intensely powerful that I'm tearing up a little even thinking about it now.

Plenty of drama writers have realized the effect that misery and suffering can have on an audience; forcing characters to make impossible choices is one of the cores of great storytelling, and giving those choices extremely high stakes is critical. But few dramas realize that darkness and grit can also serve to

make the light shine all the brighter when it finally breaks through the clouds. Odo has lost his people, has lost his love, has lost some of his most basic physical abilities, and these tragedies have formed a crucible, refining him to the purest essence of his character, and making his love him all the more. And then, suddenly, in a moment of his utmost despair, to get something back—something he never expected, but which he utterly earned—is quite simply transcendent. It's the kind of moment that reminds you why you engage in art in the first place: to care and endure and be taken aback by joy.

So maybe it shouldn't have worked. And maybe in the weeks to come, I'll be disappointed to see Odo revert to his old self, and I'll wonder what might have been. But for right now, the writers, and the actors, have earned this.

Stray observations:

- “You carry yourself too rigidly.” “This is how I've always carried myself.” -Bashir and Odo, engaging in some light theme work
- Cannot stress enough how adorable it is to watch Odo talking to his mug of goo.
- “Constable, why are you talking to a beverage?” -Worf, not getting it.
- There's a damn Bajoran ritual for everything, isn't there.
- “I was never a very good shapeshifter.” -Odo
- “Spare the rod, spoil the child.” -Dr. Mora, quoting the Bible, for some reason. (It's such an odd reference. I get not wanting to come up with a faux Bajoran knock-off, but there's no reason for Mora or Odo to have any familiarity with the Bible at all. I suppose Mora could just be quoting a phrase he heard Earthlings use, but why?)
- “If you're happy, there's something very wrong in the world.” -Quark to Odo

Next week: Sisko faces off against an old frenemy in “For The Uniform,” and Garak goes looking for Enabran Tain, and finds something much worse in “In Purgatory's Shadow.”

[Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “For The Uniform”/“In Purgatory's Shadow”](#)[Zack Handlen](#)[5/09/13 10:00AM](#)**“For The Uniform” (season five, episode 13; originally aired 2/3/1997)***In which Sisko gets his man...*

It’s hard to sell complexity in fiction. It’s hard to sell complexity anywhere, really, because the whole world is full of that shit and who wants to pay for more? But with stories, especially stories that seem to fall in the easily graspable confinement of genre, that uphill battle turns into more a straight up climb, one with few clear hand-holds, and a lot of distance to the bottom. Escapism is arguably the first, and easiest, goal of narrative: life sucks most of the time, so you give your audience a place they can go to where things make a basic kind of sense, where cause and effect holds sway, the bad guys suffer, the good guys win out. And if that doesn’t satisfy, maybe the good guys aren’t so great, and the bad guys are sympathetic; maybe you blur the lines. But the further that goes, the harder it is to pull off, partly because there are more moving pieces to account for, and partly because it’s unsettling to see heroes turn monstrous. Unless this was a stated intention from the beginning, it feels like a violation of some sort of promise. We’re supposed to be able to root for these people—if we can’t root for them, if the whole idea of “rooting” is called into question, what then?

“For The Uniform” puts Sisko in an impossible position, and then proceeds to nudge him into making a seemingly unthinkable choice. It’s an odd fit for a *Star Trek* episode. Captains in the franchise have made tough calls in the past, but Sisko’s decision to play the villain in order to force Eddington’s hand feels distinct, a kind of bar-raising that is at once thrilling and more than a little disconcerting. The

whole episode seems designed to push our comfort zones, especially when it comes to its leading man; Sisko is an angry man, but in the past, that anger has been directly proportional to the level of offense that inspired it. In this case, though, the balance is a bit off. Eddington's actions deserve censure and justice, no question, but Sisko's raging need to catch him goes beyond simple law and order. Something in what Eddington has done offends Sisko to his very core, and the story depends on how much you're willing to accept the explanation for his fury. I think it works, but the episode's climax depends on a kind of behavior that changes a lot of my assumptions about Sisko. It clarifies him in interesting ways, but those ways will only really work if the clarification lasts. This is the sort of twist which can pay off down the line, but if forgotten or ignored, looks cheap in retrospect; a shock without regard to consequence.

But before we get there, "For The Uniform" is often a very fun piece of work, in spite of all its sturm und drang. At its heart, the episode is a basic chase story, and it makes the smart choice of creating a seemingly uncatchable villain. I never thought much about Eddington while he was a Federation officer—given the nature of the show, I suspected him vaguely, but never had any serious expectations until his sudden betrayal of our heroes. But while we may never see the character again, this hour gives Ken Marshall plenty of opportunities to show why turning traitor was the best choice the writers could've made for his character. Regardless of why it happened, outlaw Eddington makes for a terrific opponent, and Marshall's clipped, calm delivery makes the character's various taunts throughout the episode all the more infuriating. It's not hard to understand at least some of Sisko's anger. If I had to deal with that smug, condescending bastard mocking me at every turn, I'd be pissed off too. (I mean, the dude emails him a copy of *Les Misérables*, and then takes the time to explain the incredibly obvious reference. Goddamn rebel hipster lit critics.)

Another reason the episode is a pleasure to watch is the effort the writers take to put Sisko at a disadvantage. During a chase sequence at the start of the hour, Eddington sets off a "cascade virus" (no idea if this is real or not, but as technobabble goes, that's top-shelf material; the phrase is at once poetic and suggestive of collapse) in the *Defiant's* computers that wipes the ship's memory banks, effectively setting them back weeks of repair time. Given how long Eddington was on Deep Space Nine before revealing himself, he had plenty of opportunities to install viruses and other forms of sabotage into the station's systems. Odo finds at least two viruses lurking in the system already, and he was only able to recognize those because they matched the virus on the *Defiant*. So, Eddington thinks ahead, which raises the stakes; but what's also neat is how, when Sisko ultimately decides to take the *Defiant* back out on the chase before the ship is completely repaired, the show finds a way to make space travel look challenging again. That's not something you see a lot on *Trek*, and since part of the appeal of the franchise is fabulous future technology, that's not a flaw. But it's still nice to, every once in a while, remind us of the machinery and effort it takes to fly between the stars. (The earlier episode with Jake and Sisko flying an old Bajoran designed craft did a good job with this; some of the battle scenes in "For The Uniform" also reminded me of [Star Trek II: Wrath Of Khan](#).)

Eddington's lingering effect on DS9 serves another purpose as well: It gets to the heart of what's driving Sisko out of his mind. In a great scene between him and Dax, he rants to her about what's

really getting to him: Eddington is human. Not a Changeling, not some Cardassian spy, not some super genius alien, but a regular old person, a person who worked with him in plain sight for months on end, and of whom Sisko never suspected a thing. That's what really galls. He's mad because Eddington has betrayed Starfleet, and pulled a fast one on Sisko himself, but what sticks in the deepest is the way the anonymous, friendly balding man has forced the captain to question his ability to do his job. This is personal when it shouldn't be personal, and that depth of frustration colors everything Sisko does, and makes his decision to poison a Maquis planet all the more difficult to parse. He crossed a line, but was his action necessary? Eddington wasn't showing any signs of backing down, and the poison idea came from him; he was using biogenic weapons to poison Cardassian-settled planets in the D.M.Z. with material that would make them uninhabitable for the Cardassians. Capturing him was a high priority, especially after he was able to gut the *Malinche*.

And yet, there's a line. There has to be a difference between Sisko and Eddington; it's right there in the episode's title. Acting on behalf of Starfleet, doing something "for the uniform" means protecting the honor of an institution that deserves defending, and Sisko's willingness to cross the line, to embrace Eddington's concept of their conflict, is both intensely clever, and hard to reconcile. The captain realizes that, if he's Javert, then Eddington must see himself as Valjean, the noble hero who gives his entire life to the protection and well-being of others. Anyone with that kind of strong, idealized self-image is vulnerable to attack, and Sisko decides on the weak point: By giving in to his obsession, he forces Eddington into a position where it's either sacrifice himself and save the rest of the colonies, or watch the people he's given up everything to protect lose their last remaining sanctuary.

It's a bold move on Sisko's part, even though the episode makes an effort to minimize the damage. The torpedoes he fires don't directly kill anyone; they just make the planets unlivable for Bajoran settlers. After the dust clears, the Cardassians who were evicted from their home by Eddington take over the planet Sisko forced the Maquis to abandon, and vice versa. So no harm done, and I do respect the show's willingness to follow through on Sisko's intensity without overtly condemning him for his behavior; as with Kira's time in the resistance, we're left to judge for ourselves if Sisko's actions were appropriate. His decision to embrace his inner villain presages, in a small way, the current run of TV antiheroes, and the attraction of characters that make strong decisions, morality be damned. But lingering doubts remain. For one, it's strange to end the hour with Eddington still able to cling to his delusions of heroism. For all Sisko's determination to make the other man pay, Eddington's self-esteem is intact. And even though Sisko's actions weren't exactly evil, something is lost in making them. Some small piece of integrity. Maybe that's the point, though. You fight so long against an enemy you never see, something has to give eventually.

Stray observations:

- I love the "holographic communicator" that O'Brien just happened to rig up before the episode. From a practical standpoint, it allows Sisko and Eddington more face time; without it, they'd be restricted to the cold open, and a lot of bickering through the view screen. But I also like the idea of Trek technology that's really just useful because it looks cool.

- Nog relays messages to engineering when the *Defiant* sets out post-virus. I was expecting some jokes about Nog being irritatingly enthusiastic, but there aren't any, which is cool. (Although he does yell loudly.)
- Dax is totally accepting of Sisko's decision, which makes sense. Their last conversation ("You know, sometimes I like it when the bad guys wins.") lets him off too easily, though. Again, it depends on whether or not the writers return to this particular well. Once Sisko decided to play baddie, capturing Eddington was almost ridiculously easy. The temptation to pull the same kind of trick again will be all the higher when the next crisis arrives.

"In Purgatory's Shadow" (season five, episode 14; originally aired 2/10/1997)

In which BASHIR IS A CHANGELING...

There's a lot to talk about in this episode, but let's get this out of the way first: How long has Bashir been a Changeling?

This season hasn't really had a Bashir-centric storyline. Looking over the run to this point, I'd have a hard time believing the Bashir we saw in ["Trials And Tribble-ations"](#) wasn't the real thing; a Changeling would have a hard time keeping up the O'Brien/Bashir chemistry. I doubt the Bashir who broke up with Leeta (or whom Leeta broke up with, or who mutually agreed to end a relationship with etc.) was a phony, and the Bashir of ["Things Past"](#) was too invested in Odo and the others' fate to not be himself. But I can't be sure about that one, and after that point, all bets are off. Maybe the writers have confirmed one way or the other, but there's a brilliant creepiness to Julian popping out at the Jem'Hadar internment camp without any significant setup or foreshadowing. Sure, the fake Bashir had been acting a little sharper than usual back on the station. While the Changeling's ability to see through Garak's lie wasn't surprising, his clear, smug pleasure at catching the Cardassian wasn't like the doctor we've come to know and love; and there was a certain arrogance to the way he carried himself, a certain "God, you idiots are so easy to fool" subtext under his few lines. But this is all in retrospect. At the time, the reveal that the station's Bashir wasn't the real thing blew my freakin' mind.

But back up a bit, because "In Purgatory's Shadow" isn't really about Bashir. After a few weeks of character dalliances, time travel, and vacation spots, this episode returns us to what's presumably the season's over-arching plotline: the incipient war with the Dominion. And where earlier stories about the buildup to the war have contented themselves with conspiracy theory and suggestion, this one dives straight in. By the end of the hour, Garak, Worf, and Bashir are trapped in Internment Camp 317; the fake Bashir has managed to short circuit DS9's one hope at closing off the wormhole; and Sisko and the others are staring at a fleet of Jem'Hadar warships. As cliffhangers go, this is pretty swell. Not [Locutus of the Borg](#) level, maybe, but the Dominion threat is a more integral part of DS9's design than the Borg ever were in [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#). This plays like the start of a long awaited pay-off, and even if it isn't, even if the writers find some way to walk this back (and they'll have to find

something, as we're barely past the season's midpoint), the status quo has been changed. The Founders have once again demonstrated their intent and raised the stakes of the entire series.

This is a two-parter, though, and as is so often the case with two-parters, the first half is less a story in its own right than a bunch of scenes setting up part two. Compare/contrast this with "For The Uniform." In the former, we spend most of the hour onboard the Defiant; the focus is on Sisko, and his hunt, and there's very little in the script that doesn't involve him or reflect back on him. In "In Purgatory's Shadow," there's an adorable cold open with Kira helping Odo resettle his Changeling furniture; then we find out about a Cardassian code signal from the Gamma Quadrant; then Garak interprets it, lies, tries to go off by himself, gets caught; Sisko decides to let Garak go after the signal anyway, but only if Worf goes with him; aaaaaand 20 minutes later, they leave.

Well, maybe not 20 minutes. I didn't have a stop-watch. But it takes half a dozen scenes before Worf and Garak are on that shuttle together, and it takes a few scenes after that before they get picked up by the Jem'Hadar. Most of these scenes are solid enough, character-building exchanges that remind us of/work to establish relationships, but they don't move the plot forward much, and there's a kind of drag to the first half of the episode that can be a little frustrating at times. Garak and Ziyal's friendship (which may be something more) is interesting, and Gul Dukat's anger at discovering that friendship could lead somewhere, but it doesn't tie into what we really care about. The fact that Ziyal ultimately turns on her father, and disobeys his order to leave the station, is moderately satisfying (it's always fun to see someone say no to Dukat), but given everything else that's going on, it's a small blip on the corner of a very busy radar a screen.

Then again, it's hard to really say how any of this fits together before we get to next week's second half. I doubt Worf and Dax's exchange about goodbyes and Klingon opera is going to matter all that much, but it was a decent conversation between the two of them that made their relationship seem not completely horrible, so there's that. One relationship that does pay off in this episode is one that I'd long thought closed for good: Garak and Enabran Tain. After Tain's disappearance in ["The Die Is Cast,"](#) it seemed plausible enough that the former head of the Obsidian Order was dead, victim to his own hubris and inability to recognize the true nature of the Dominion threat. This assumption was neither confirmed nor denied when Garak asked for information from the female Changeling; she told him Tain was dead, but by her logic, all Cardassians were dead. They just hadn't realized it yet. The transmission Garak translates at the start of the story is supposedly a message from Tain, but that could mean anything. The Founders are tricky, and when Worf and Garak stumble across the Jem'Hadar fleet, it looks like they've fallen into another trap.

Garak and Worf haven't hurt the Dominion invasion in any substantial way, but their discovery of the threat wasn't planned. Tain really did send the message, and he's trapped in the same Internment Camp that Garak and Worf are sent to. I'll allow it, although it's convenient—especially considering that General Martok is there to, getting beat up by Jem'Hadar soldiers. (Sorry, that was redundant.) But it's worth the convenience to see Garak struggle once more with failing to live up to the expectations of his former boss; after all, it's doubtful Tain sent a message purely for the pleasure of

the tailor's company, and Worf and Garak don't seem to be doing so great on the "rescue" front. It's hilarious to watch Garak complaining to Bashir about Tain's attitude, given that Tain is dying, and Bashir has been stuck in hell for a month now. And then the final reveal, as Tain slips away: He's Garak's father. Their connection always made sense, but now it just clicks into place a little clearer, just as Garak himself comes a trifle more into focus.

Really, that's the main non-plot effect of the episode: bringing things into focus. It's a reminder of the complacency of the past few weeks, as our heroes have struggled with their own personal demons while forgetting the big hulking threat still lurking the next galaxy over. That's how the show tells its stories, but that's also how life tends to work: The darkness on the horizon is terrifying, but without form, the terror fades away, turns into acceptance. The Changelings want everyone dead, but hey, there's a station to run, debts to be repaid, lives to lead. We're only really as capable as the immediate crisis demands of us. Everything else is just background.

"In Purgatory's Shadow" is mostly about setting the table for the meal to come, but it offers up some quality silverware, and the smells coming from the kitchen have my mouth watering. (Yeah, that metaphor isn't great, but it was one of those "I'm in this now, and I'm going to keep being in this until we get through it together" moments.) The sight of the fleet coming through the wormhole as Sisko's last ditch attempt to stop them fails is shocking enough, but the more intimate questions are the ones that attract the most interest. Like, is someone on the station going to figure out who Bashir is before it's too late? (Or too late-er, I guess.) And what will the Changelings make of the fact that Odo got his mojo back? What's Sisko going to do next? And back in the Internment Camp, how are Garak, Worf, Mortak, and Bashir going to escape? That last has me especially excited, because I'm a sucker for great escape stories, and also because Garak now has a very specific reason to hate the Changelings. He once tried to murder their entire race. That probably isn't an option right now, but he's not someone you want for an enemy. There are plenty of ways of changing your shape. Also, Worf is, really good at punching things. That should probably come in handy.

Stray observations:

- Odo has self-help books on dating. That is adorable.
- Gul Dukat: still an asshole.
- "At the first sign of betrayal, I will kill him, but I promise to bring the body back intact." "I assume that's a joke." "We will see."—Worf can do funny.
- Man, that scene with Worf and Garak in the shuttle is just the definition of time-killing. It's not terrible, and I guess it's entertaining to watch Garak screw with the easily trusting Worf, but after all the talk that precedes it, it's hard not wish they'd gotten to the fireworks factory a few minutes earlier.
- "I should have killed your mother before you were born."—Tain, not big on fatherly love. (That said, his anecdote about meeting Garak when Garak was just a boy is surprisingly emotional.)

Next week: The saga continues with “By Inferno’s Light,” and Bashir learns some tough truths in “Doctor Bashir, I Presume?”

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “By Inferno’s Light”/“Doctor Bashir, I Presume?”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[5/15/13 10:00AM](#)

“By Inferno’s Light” (season 5, episode 15; originally 2/17/1997)

In which Gul Dukat is a son of a...

Turning Bashir into a Changeling—not the real Bashir, of course, just the one we’d been seeing on the station for the past few episodes—was a great twist. It used information that was readily available to us, and didn’t cheat to make the plot work; while you can argue over some aspects of the fake-Bashir’s behavior, the fundamental truth is, we knew the Changelings were capable of this sort of behavior, and there’s every reason to believe they’d want someone on DS9, even before we learn what their ultimate plan is at the end of this episode. It’s smart, engaging writing. But it also has a limited impact. By the end of “By Inferno’s Light,” the real Julian is back where he belongs, and the impostor is dead, having died in an attempt to basically blow up an entire solar system. While the paranoia levels for the audience have been raised, there’s no real sense that this is going to be something we’ll return to in the future. And even if we do, it’ll most likely be a one off episode, or a line from Bashir about how much he doesn’t care for the Jem’Hadar.

This isn’t a criticism. It was cool idea, and a well-executed one. But for my money, the most thrilling development in an hour full of pretty terrific “Fuck yeah!” moments is the discovery that Gul Dukat has been working on secret negotiations between the Cardassian government and the Dominion; and what’s more, the end result of those negotiations has managed to leave Dukat as ruler of his home

planet. While Dukat isn't a member of the show's main ensemble, he's always hung around the edges, and this sudden reversal of fortune, from Klingon-hatin' guerrilla fighter to ruler of a planet, is both remarkable and just plausible enough to work. It makes those scenes I groused about last week between him and Ziyal much more interesting in retrospect (although I don't retract my mild criticism), and it helps to kick off this hour with a tremendous sense of energy. We find this out in the cold open; at first, there's shock at the arrival of the Jem'Hadar fleet, and then seconds later, the fleet sails off and Dukat goes with it, saving time for one final "Screw off" for Kira before he goes.

The Bashir reveal is a great piece of showmanship, but the transition for Dukat is the more impressive piece of writing. It makes sense to me; it's curious that the Founders have seemingly reneged on their seemingly intractable hatred of Cardassians, but we don't know the full extent of their plans, and besides, they seem like the kind of folks that would be willing to put their hatred aside if it furthered their goals. Given how much Dukat's rage has been directed at Klingons the last few times we've seen him, the whole thing has a manipulative panache to it—for all his arrogance, Dukat has basically set the stage for turning his homeworld into another occupied Bajor. He believes he's canny enough to use the situation to his advantage, and this false assumption could potentially ruin everything. It's masterfully done, and the more I think about it, the more it impresses me. Not just because it fits, not just because of what it tells us about the Founders and Dukat, but because it once again shows how willing the writers are to change the status quo without losing that central conflict. First there was the Founders; then there were the Founders and (unwittingly) the Klingons; and now it's the Founders and Cardassia. The players shift, but the stakes remain high. It's a sequence of moves which could have seemed like stalling, but instead play like a clarification of just how deadly an enemy the Founders are. This isn't the Borg. They don't simply smash through resistance. They plan, bide their time, and keep changing the field until it suits their needs.

And this isn't even the focus of the episode! "By Inferno's Light" has two main plots: Garak, Worf, and Bashir's efforts to escape the prison camp, and Sisko's reaction to the shifting Dominion threat back on DS9. The former takes precedence for most of the hour, and it plays like the more urgent of the two, even though the fate of the station, and Bajor, would seem like a much bigger deal. Partly that's because we know Bashir needs to get back to DS9 and warn everyone about the impostor, but it's also a factor of how cleverly the writers turn the screws on the characters in the camp.

First, there's poor Worf, stuck fighting against Jem'Hadar soldiers as a training exercise. This plays a bit like a 10-minute apology to the character for all those YouTube compilations of Worf getting his ass handed to him, and I mean that in the best possible way. He makes it through one fight mildly scathed but ready for more, and by the end of the first day, he's got a few broken ribs, and he's still not beaten yet. And this goes on, in a facility with severely limited access to medical resources (to put it mildly): Worf goes out, kicks some ass, and comes back so Bashir can wave his hands around and look worried. Most of the fighting takes place off screen (given how much else is going on in the hour, this makes sense), but the damage is evident, and it's thrilling to see Worf finally live up to the high standard he's set for himself. Most of the time, Worf's warrior ways are restricted to the holodeck, or to his piloting

the *Defiant*. Here, he's forced into meeting the enemy on the most restrictive field imaginable, and he rises to the challenge admirably.

And it pays off. After Worf has defeated every warrior sent to fight him, the captain of the Jem'Hadar steps into the ring. Worf is severely injured, and most likely exhausted, and the captain makes short work of him—except Worf refuses to stand down. Every time he falls, he rises, and the captain is so impressed by his resilience that when the Vorta warden of the camp orders Worf killed, the captain refuses to pull the trigger. This decision dooms them both (although Worf manages a last second escape), but both suggest a common ground between the Jem'Hadar and the Klingons that might be useful down the line. And really, it's hard to imagine anything more awesomely Klingon than staving off defeat by willpower alone.

Willpower is a bit of a running theme this week, as while Worf is off playing Space Rocky, Garak is stuck in the hidden area where Tain programmed his distress signal, working to reprogram the system to contact their runabout. This storyline is a bit clunkier than Worf's; Tain's death from last week is largely to one side, as Garak is forced to deal with a sudden attack of claustrophobia, and the results are a little forced. Andrew Robinson sells the hell out of it, and his monologues inside the wall are compelling enough, but for the phobia to strike him all of a sudden smacks of convenience on the writers' part, as though they realized they needed some way to add tension to the sequence but didn't want to add anymore plot. It also makes the Jem'Hadar a lot less formidable when "hide a guy behind a wall" is a viable escape strategy. Still, Garak's struggles work on the basic, nerve-ending level, and his decision to go back into the hole after suffering a severe panic attack enriches his character and earns him the respect of the hard-to-please Worf. Clunky or not, that last moment between the two is immensely satisfying.

Also satisfying: The deft way the episode cuts between events at the prison camp, and the increasingly tense stand-off back home. Cross-cutting is an old tradition in film and television (he said, lacking the historical knowledge to back this up at all), but it's difficult to do well. Too often, jumping between exciting plot lines means sacrificing pacing to create the impression of simultaneous action; it's also a way to make an episode's structure appear more dynamic.

It works beautifully here. *DS9* has had exciting hours in the past, but I'm not sure I can remember a climactic 15 minutes as thrilling as this one, and that excitement is due in large part to the way the two stories play off each other. In the camp, things go from bad to worse as Worf struggles to stay alive, Garak struggles with his sanity, and the Jem'Hadar guards finally wise up (i.e., they get orders from Dukat) and stop by the cell to execute the tailor. As that explodes, back on the station, Sisko is juggling his options as a deadline approaches. Dukat has declared war on DS9, and things look bleak until Gowron and his Klingons show up—there's no reason for the Federation and the Klingons to be at war anymore, so Sisko arranges a quick reinstatement of the Khitomer Accords, and waits for the Jem'Hadar fleet to arrive. Warp signatures hit the computer from all over, but no one can find any ships to shoot at. Suspense mounts—Garak finally succeeds in hacking the computer, saving everyone at the last possible second; the group races back to Alpha Quadrant, and Bashir sends a message

about the impostor; Sisko gets the message, pieces together what's happened, and that's when we realize the true plan. Dukat has no real interest in DS9. The Changeling posing as Bashir intends to sacrifice himself to set off a charge in the system's sun that will wipe out all life in the system.

Again, we see the Founders machinations are never as straightforward as they appear; and again we're reminded of how much they dislike direct combat, choosing obfuscation and long cons over the brute force of war. Which isn't to say they won't crush their enemies if they're forced to, but look at how things worked out with the Cardassians. A race they ostensibly despised has now provided them with a foothold in the quadrant, with defensive outposts and bodies on the ground (so to speak). Sure, their plan here fails, stymied in the last minute by Garak, Sisko's clever thinking, and Kira's willingness to push the *Defiant* to extremes, but they still end up in a better position at the end of the episode than they did at the start. The biggest downside is that Sisko now has the Klingons and the Romulans on his side. But there's time left. The Founders have proven they can kidnap DS9 personnel, arrange private negotiations that shift the political situation an entire sector, and came within 10 seconds of killing millions. Sisko and his team have proven that they can save in the day at the last possible moment. Sounds like a fair fight to me.

Stray observations:

- I hope we get a good episode about how the rest of Cardassia responds to the sudden takeover. There's something tragic about it.
- "Never turn your back on a Breen." Probably because they look like LEIA IN BOUNTY HUNTER DISGUISE i am so sorry.
- Dukat intends to drive out the Klingons and the Maquis. Not a huge twist, but it's interesting to have this happen so soon after "For The Uniform."
- Speaking of previous episodes, I guess we know why Sisko was freaking out about locusts and Cardassia and whatnot.
- "I cannot defeat this Klingon. All I can do is kill him and that no longer holds my interest." — Jem'Hadar warrior. Cannot stress enough how great it was to watch him yield when faced with Worf's refusal to back down; not because Worf represents any physical threat (the guy is close to unconsciousness), but because his own sense of honor forces him to respect Worf's determination. Less great, but still important: the warrior is immediately killed by his own men on orders from the Vorta in command of the camp. Boy, the Vorta and the Jem'Hadar really don't get along too great. Wonder if that's going to go anywhere.
- DS9 gets a permanent Klingon garrison, and Sisko puts Martok in charge. Neat!
- The only fallout from faux Bashir's time on the station? O'Brien makes a joke at the real Bashir's expense. ("Well, for one thing, he was a lot easier to get along with.")

“Doctor Bashir, I Presume?” (season 5, episode 16)*In which Bashir is more than meets the eye...*

“Doctor Bashir, I Presume?” has us shifting gears, although not nearly as much as the first half of the episode would suggest. After the intensity of the new threat from the Dominion, we get a pair of smaller stories, focused on a handful of characters. In the subplot, Rom struggles to find the courage to express his feelings to Leeta, while she waits patiently for him to ask her on a date; and in the main plot, Bashir learns he’s been chosen as the model for a holographic medical program. The tone is light, exemplified by a guest star turn from the always welcome Robert Picardo. By this point, *Star Trek: Voyager* had been on the air for a couple years, and Picardo’s character is one of the only two people on the show to have ever made any impression on me; I’m going to make a small jump and assume he’s a fan favorite, because it’s Robert Picardo. He does excellent work here, playing an arrogant, mildly nebbishy scientist who seems like a creep at first, but then turns out to be not really so bad once you get past his irritating exterior. So, the Picardo specialty, really.

But Zimmerman (Picard’s scientist character) isn’t the focus here; he’s more of a catalyst that forces the real stories into motion. In Rom’s case, it’s simple enough. Leeta keeps giving Rom a chance to ask her out, he can’t work up the courage to do it, and then Zimmerman forces the issue by giving Leeta a great reason to leave the station. It’s not a particularly deep conflict, and it’s watchable because the actors are game and the characters endearing; Picardo manages to make Zimmerman’s infatuation with Leeta surprisingly un-creepy, and it’s sweet to see both Rom and Leeta find happiness together. But I’d still be happy if I never had to see this particular sort of silliness ever again. Rom’s shyness is a forced obstacle that’s mostly just frustrating to watch, and Leeta’s weird refusal to actually ask him out her own damn self is kind of infuriating. Sure, you can say there’s some Bajoran philosophical reason that holds her back, but nobody mentions it, and that would still sound pretty dumb. She knows he likes her—she literally says she does. The whole thing isn’t painful for anything, but it’s good when it’s over.

Much more compelling, and a bit heavier on the melodrama, is Bashir’s story. What starts off as a fun excuse to let another *Trek* actor guest on the series turns into something a lot more complex when Bashir’s parents show up on the station. Zimmerman is there to record Bashir’s image, and construct a hologram program based off his looks and personality to use at Starfleet locations that can’t necessarily afford the space for medical personnel. Basically, it’s like the Doctor from *Voyager* (a program Zimmerman created and based on himself, naturally), only this program is designed to be more long term. So there’s some fun stuff with O’Brien throwing out some jokes, and a goofy exchange between the Bashir hologram and the Zimmerman hologram, and then Zimmerman starts interviewing people on the station about Bashir. Bashir begs the scientist not to contact his parents, but Zimmerman goes against his wishes, and that’s when things get interesting.

At first, it’s a lot of funny-and-uncomfortable gags about sons resenting their parents. Brian George and Fadwa El Guindi as Richard and Amsha Bashir are convincingly loving but just a little off; Richard in particular comes off as a charming, but slightly shiftless, dreamer, the kind of fast-talking, genial con

man who's less a villain than a guy whose reach is perpetually exceeding his grasp. This helps to justify the episode's big twist: Bashir was genetically enhanced when he was 6 years old, to give him exceptional intelligence and physical abilities. I'm assuming this wasn't planned ahead of time, but as retcons go, it's pretty cool, and it's introduced smoothly here. Suspicions are raised when Bashir asks Zimmerman to leave his folks out of the project, but there's the foreshadowing doesn't really kick in until mom, dad, and Julian are having dinner, and Bashir starts alluding to this "secret" between them. Up until then, the episode plays like a goofy fun. Even the reveal is sort of silly: Richard confesses his sins to the Bashir hologram, mistaking the program for his son like this was some kind of nutty sci-fi farce.

Things get serious after that, though, and that seriousness helps change the addition to Bashir's backstory. It's a little over-the-top in places, but the actors sell the idea sincerely, and Bashir's resentment isn't all that different from the resentment most gifted children feel towards their parents eventually; that deep-rooted, illogical certainty that Mom and Dad only really love you for your abilities, for the positive impression you can lend to their legacy. In Bashir's case, the fear/anger is especially acute, given that he has seemingly irrefutable evidence that his parents weren't satisfied with his real self. The argument between father and son is a raw one, rawer than we've maybe ever seen Bashir get on the show, and it helps distract from some of the sketchier aspects of the twist—like the fact that Bashir has significantly better reflexes than a normal human being. The doctor has been good at sports in the past, but he's never been *that* good, and presumably there were times over the run of the series when his super smarts and skills would've been useful. Yet, nothing springs immediately to mind, which means it gets a pass. Besides, it helps explain how Bashir survived a month in a Jem'Hadar internment camp with nothing worse than a dirty face and some bad memories.

The drama between the doctor and his folks works out okay; Richard is a stand up guy, and when the secret comes out, he does the right thing and reports himself to the authorities. He'll be going away to a minimum security prison in New Zealand for a couple years (they must put on awesome *Lord Of The Rings* cosplay), and Julian gets to keep his job. It's good that there's some consequence for all this, and that Bashir doesn't have to pay for his parents' mistakes. But while I'm glad to meet those parents, and I always enjoy a good angst-shedding squabble, what mostly interests me about "Doctor Bashir, I Presume?" is how it will affect Bashir's character down the line. I doubt he'll start leaping tall buildings in a single bound or anything like that. We know who Julian is by now: a dedicated doctor, determined to do the right thing. There's no reason for that to change. But I like how this means he's just one more misfit toy, hiding in plain sight. Even if the genetic alterations are never mentioned again, we'll know they're there, and we'll know that deep down, he'll always be that 6-year-old boy, struggling to keep up with his peers, knowing he'll never be good enough.

Stray observations:

- Robert Picardo basically disappears for the back half of this one. I get why: The real conflict is between Bashir and his dad, and needs all the time it can get. But I wish he'd been more involved, because man, I love me some Robert Picardo.
- The random admiral who gives a lecture at the end about the horrors of genetic engineering is hilarious. The reference to Khan is nice (although he gives the wrong era for the Eugenics War), but the speech plays like the end of an anti-drug PSA.
- Quark tries to get Rom to forget his romantic woes with a little *Vulcan Love Slave Part 2: The Revenge*. Once again, we are reminded how gross those holosuites must be.
- The last scene between Bashir and O'Brien is great, as they always are. It's a nice touch how the dartboard sound effects indicate Bashir is winning even before we see where the darts landed.

Next week: Odo has a romance in "A Simple Investigation" and Quark has a conscience in "Business As Usual."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “A Simple Investigation”/“Business As Usual”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[5/23/13 10:00AM](#)

“A Simple Investigation” (season five, episode 17; originally aired 3/31/1997)

In which Odo has an adventure (adventure meaning “sex”).

When you’re socially awkward, one of the dreams is that someone will find you. This isn’t true of everybody; there are plenty of introverts and shy folks and flailers who would be perfectly happy to stay in the shadows, pining at the stars. But it’s not unreasonable to suggest that large numbers of folks who fumble through conversations terrified that everyone can see them sweat, yearn for some magical stranger to remove them from their largely self-induced corner. That’s what so much of the romantic myth that drives our culture is based on. “Love” becomes less of a mundane, reliable connection between individuals, and more of a panacea that can cure the ills of insecurity, loneliness, guilt, embarrassment, self-loathing, and so on. We—and I’m including myself in this because, well, come on—realize the stupidity of the wish, which makes the experience all of the more painful. There’s something so pathetically, idiotically vulnerable about wanting a some beautiful (yes, always) someone to look at you see what everyone else has been missing, and more, to reach past your clumsiness and terror and do whatever it is you need done. It’s selfish, and its doomed, and yet it’s not hard to understand the appeal. Just once, to have someone save you. Just once, to feel safe.

Yeah, so, it’s complex and weird and a total fantasy, and it’s also a big part of what makes “A Simple Investigation” compelling to watch. This isn’t a perfect episode; it’s hamstrung by a tepid guest star

and a story that understands its clichés without embracing them enough to transcend them. The plot wouldn't have been much out of place in the show's first or second season. Not terrible, really, but simplistic, and without the larger implications or complexity we've come to expect.

But "A Simple Investigation" isn't a bad episode, either, and while the core story is straightforward enough, the details filled in by *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*'s main ensemble provide for an emotional depth that might otherwise have been lacking. One of the greatest tools narrative television has at its disposal is the ability to create a sense of communal history simply through the accumulation of time. Serialization helps, but it's not as important as the simple wait of all the hours we've spent watching these characters, and knowing everything they've been through. The story becomes as much about who it's happening to as it is about what's happening.

That means Odo in this particular case. One of the episode's best jokes comes early on. Bashir just got in a new holosuite program, another Bond-like adventure, and the plan is for him, Dax, O'Brien, and Odo to participate. This in and of itself is just delightful, and the pay off later in the episode, when Odo comes to see Bashir and the good doctor is in the middle of wooing a blonde in a limousine, is hilarious. (O'Brien's decision to take advantage of Bashir while he's talking to Odo is maybe the funniest gag I've ever seen on the show.) But the joke I'm talking about is a subtler one. Odo declines to join in with the festivities, presumably because the thought of all that seduction makes him uncomfortable. He then proceeds to stumble into his very own spy adventure, complete with damsel-in-distress, wisecracking thugs, and a complicated plot about an evil mastermind. Arguably this is more private-detective stuff than espionage, but still, the gag holds: Odo is getting his own holosuite experience, whether he wants it or not. The only downside is, he can't pick the ending.

Strip away the specifics, and the central arc of this hour is easy to predict. Odo gets interested in Arissa (Dey Young) because he's interested in mysteries, and because she tells him he has "bedroom eyes." Their relationship deepens, she's attracted to him because she's scared and he's a trustworthy, reassuring presence; he's into her because she's attractive, and actually regards him as a potential sexual partner. They hook up, it's rather lovely; there's a fight with the bad guys; Odo saves the day, but wouldn't you know it, there's a twist that means he and Arissa won't be spending anymore time together. A little heartbreaking, but still an important chapter in Odo's development, and entertaining for all that.

It's odd, though, that the most interesting non-Odo parts of the story are held off until the end. In the final 10 minutes, it's revealed that Arissa is actually a kind of federal agent gone deep undercover to track down a crime boss. And when I say "deep," I mean, "memory wipe of her old personality" deep. The Arissa Odo meets has no idea of her real self; she just knows she's tired of working as a blackmailer for a bad guy, and wants her freedom. While I realize this would be hard to sell without shifting the focus too far off Odo (and he really should be the central figure in all this, because he's the one we have the most important attachment to), it seems like a lot of potentially fascinating detail has been generated merely to get us through an otherwise comparatively straightforward plot. The whole idea of Arissa having her mind wiped seems like it could've been the main premise of an entire

episode, and that idea, plus her comments about serving as a psychic prostitute, suggest a whole world of sci-fi concepts of which *DS9* has only brushed the surface. I wouldn't say that's a flaw of the script, exactly, but it does sometimes seem like we're seeing the least interesting version possible of these events. If it wasn't for Odo and the few beats we get with the rest of the crew, this would all be weirdly bland; and yet summarizing the backstory makes it sound like something swiped from Philip K. Dick.

The biggest problem may be Dey Young. She gets better as the episode allows her to open up a little, but the story depends on her and Odo striking some sort of meet-cute in their first scene, and the chemistry isn't there. The "bedroom eyes" comment is, admittedly, a bit of a hard sell, but there's no warmth or curiosity to her. She may just be miscast; this is a part that needs someone who can convey vulnerability and strength without coming across as a victim, but Young seems better suited to a kind of distant, icy disdain. While that may be slightly more realistic for the character, it doesn't work on screen, especially in a narrative like this that needs for everyone involved to be just that much more heightened than usual.

Still, their scene in bed together isn't bad at all, and once they get past the initial awkwardness, the two actors do come across as believably drawn to one another. The ending isn't all that tragic; Odo is clearly sad that he's losing his first girlfriend, but hey, he's had his first humanoid sex, and he seems to have enjoyed it, so maybe he can actually try dating now. Arissa, her mind (and real name) restored, goes back to her husband, and Odo goes back to being grumpy and avoiding his friends. It's funny, but I find it hard to feel too bad for him now. No matter how hard he tries to avoid it, adventures keep finding him. At least this one let him have the fantasy, if only for a little while.

Stray observations:

- Apparently, Odo can "mingle" with solids. I have no idea how that would work, but Arissa seemed to enjoy it.
- The hit men truly are hilarious. Nearly all of the funny bits in the episode land, which makes it that much more enjoyable to watch. (I could've used a bit more humor, actually, especially in some of the less romantic Odo/Arissa scenes. There's a lack of spark in the central relationship that keeps a decent entry from being great.)
- Kira is surprisingly invested in Odo's dating life. Just putting that out there.
- This week in Odo awesomeness: He's reading a detective story, and he figured out the killer's identity by the third page. (Actually, that sounds more like sloppy writing than brilliant deduction.)
- Another advantage of main character history: Odo doesn't need much more motive for helping Arissa beyond, "She's in trouble," but the fact that he's impressed by her desire to stop working for an evil force, given his own failure to quit the Cardassians, is a nice touch.

“Business As Usual” (season five, episode 18; originally aired 4/7/1997)*In which Quark makes the wrong investment...*

Usually I’m in favor of *DS9*’s approach to serialization; the mix of short, one-episode stories and longer narratives spread out over the course of a season or more, is a good fit for a TV show. I don’t mind that the Dominion threat is hanging in the background right now, because that seems more realistic to me than otherwise. Crises aren’t always happening. Life goes on between deadlines. But sometimes an episode will pop up that I’ll wish had more time to really get its point across, and “Business As Usual” is that sort of episode. That’s not to say that its message is obscure or hard to parse: Selling weapons, no matter how profitable, is evil. Quark shouldn’t do it. The end.

It’s hard to object to this on principle. Arms dealers don’t show up on television regularly enough for this to be a cliché, and a Quark-centric story that isn’t broadly comedic is a welcome change of pace. Armin Shimerman is as excellent as ever, and the guest stars deliver solid work. The resolution is clever, and feels earned; Quark’s decision to dabble in the waters of immoral violence-slinging, before jumping back onto dry land, makes sense. And yet there’s a closed-off simplicity to all this that cuts back on the potential impact. It’s all a closed unit. We learn Quark is worried about money; his cousin Gaila (Josh Pais), who gave us the death ship in [“Little Green Men,”](#) comes by the bar with a tempting proposition; then it’s shady dealings, scary boss, judgmental friends, and finally, a finale that takes every threatening piece off the table and returns us to the status quo.

This is how TV used to be in many respects, and there are a lot of things I miss about the old model. Too many shows these days jump into full serialization without understanding the need for strong episode-by-episode storytelling (I’m looking at you, [The Walking Dead](#)), and the assumption that “serialized” equals “quality” is as wrong-headed to television drama as the belief that single-camera comedies are inherently better than multi-cam is to TV comedy. But the old model wasn’t perfect, and to me, “Business As Usual” is an example of how the almost ruthless efficiency of standalone structure can make stories come across as hermetically sealed, blunting their impact by stripping them down to their simplest parts. “Business As Usual” is good—it’s better than “A Simple Investigation,” and in the top tier of Quark-centric episodes so far. But it’s too simplified to it for my tastes. The pieces all line up in a neat way that lets us all feel smug about our own moral superiority.

The worst of this comes from the way the others on the station treat Odo after he gets involved with Gaila and Hagath (Steven Berkoff, doing his *Beverly Hills Cop*-bad-guy routine in space), Gaila’s employer. Quark’s always been the black sheep of the family, which is fine in theory; *Star Trek* could use a few more black sheep. But while it’s understandable that the others would be upset at Quark’s behavior, there’s a weird lack of empathy for what drove him to his decision. It’s a question of presentation, really, and it’s not as if Quark doesn’t deserve the rolled eyes and irritation. But Shimerman is so good at making him sympathetic that the dismissal he gets from the only people in his life he can really consider his friends makes the others come across as self-satisfied and priggish. After all, it’s not like anyone else on the station ever has to worry about money. (But then, Quark

could just decide to stop trying to run a business altogether, and join up with the Federation like Rom. Because resistance is futile.)

I realize I'm on shaky ground here. I do think Dax's rage works. Aside from Odo, she's the only member of the ensemble with a close relationship with Quark, and their friendship, what little we've seen of it, has always made sense. The idea that she'd take his actions as an almost personal betrayal helps to give all that condemnation a necessary specificity. But the others just come across as scolds, and while that could be intentional—forcing us into Quark's shoes by having familiar faces turn cold—it has the unfortunate effect of creating a kind of binary situation. Instead of Quark getting into a gray area and having to figure out himself just where he'll draw the line, he steps off the path and has to deal with the immediate, obvious recriminations. Gaila is so slimy, and Hagath is so clearly, malevolently insane, that the middle part of the episode is a process of waiting to see what finally brings Quark to his senses. Which may be the problem with all “message” episodes, really. They're color-coded so clearly that there's no real tension until the comeuppances start piling up.

There's a rule at the TV Club, and it's a good one, that our job as reviewers isn't to try and “fix” an episode in our commentary, or imagine some magical situation in which everything is theoretically perfect; this is the kind of thinking that leads to sloppy writing, because it allows us to create ideal scenarios without ever having to deliver on them. (Trust me, I've made this mistake a lot.) So I'll just say that I wonder if letting this arc build more might not have helped smooth out its more thuddingly obvious moments. Ideally, if you're going to have a character engage in criminal (or at least unethical) activity in order to benefit himself, there should be a sense that their indulgences are giving them the kind of instant gratification that makes morality easier to ignore. But while Quark is making money hand over fist, Hagath funnels all that money directly to the Ferengi's creditors. Which is cool in the sense that Quark never gets to have any fun with his wrongdoing (making it that much easier for us to forgive him when he returns to the fold), but again, it makes that decision to go back to the relatively straight and narrow all the simpler. The brevity of all this puts it into after-school special territory, and it might've been more effective to have Quark's corruption happen more gradually, thus giving his redemption actual stakes.

But that also could've been boring and dumb; we'll never know. Besides, it's not like the show doesn't have other season-long arcs to deal with. As for the episode at hand, it's good; sometimes it's easy to get caught up in critique and lose sight of what works. For all my criticism, I appreciate how logically the slippery slope of arms-dealing is presented here. Gaila is a creep, no question, but Quark's financial vulnerability, combined with his isolation from his own people, make him an easy mark. It's hard to blame him for wanting a taste of the good life, especially considering all the crap he's been through of late. The idea of using the holosuite to sell weapons is a smart use of the technology, and it's great how detached all the demonstrations are from actual, painful violence; when a potential customer wants to test fire a few shots, Quark just calls up a robot or an armored thug to serve as a target, no mess required.

Is the ending too neat? Sure, but that's built into the model. I can't imagine Quark getting thrown in jail, or killed, and the writers needed to find a way to resolve the crisis and allow everything to be back on the same footing next week. On those terms, this works: Quark forces Hagath and Gaila to deal with the consequences of their behavior, gets some people killed, and convinces Sisko that everything is back to the way it should be. Maybe this would've worked better if it hadn't been restricted by the then demands of the medium, but as is, it's still a great showcase for Shimerman, with a satisfying payoff.

Stray observations:

- Lawrence Tierney, huh? I kept expecting him to walk off in the middle of his scene, disgusted with everyone.
- Oh, there's also a B-plot about O'Brien trying to get his baby to sleep. It's very cute, and the tag at the end, with Worf talking about how he wishes he could've experienced this with Alexander, is unexpected and sweet.
- For an episode on weapons and war, this is rarely as unsettling as it probably should be, with one great exception: Gaila's speech about the stars. Too much of the time we spend with the villains is just gangster posturing, but Quark's cousin's convincing contempt for the value of life is just low-key enough to be plausible. (It's also reminiscent of the cuckoo clock monologue in *The Third Man*.)

Next week: Kira deals with some stuff in "Ties Of Blood And Water" and we get another Quark episode with the unpromisingly titled "Ferengi Love Songs."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Ties Of Blood And Water” / “Ferengi Love Songs”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[5/30/13 10:00AM](#)

“Ties Of Blood And Water” (season five, episode 19; originally aired 4/14/1997)

In which Kira doesn’t want to say goodbye...

There’s been a lot of talk lately about the pleasures and perils of binge-watching television. Like so much of what we talk about on the Internet, it’s never something I’ve really thought about before; I’ve gone on runs of shows from time to time, but it’s always felt like a private, almost shameful thing—what kind of a messed up shut-in can spend three days of vacation plowing through *Slings And Arrows* in its entirety? (Hand raised.) But now everybody’s doing it, and everybody else is worried about it, and like anything, there are advantages and disadvantages. I don’t binge-watch *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*; I stick to the schedule, two episodes a week, and while that means I often miss on foreshadowing, it’s fun to not know what’s coming. Still, sometimes the grind kicks in, and this week got me to thinking about how that grind can affect how I watch the show, which, in turn, affects how I write about it.

“Ties Of Blood And Water” is another not-terrible-not-classic hour, with some excellent acting from the cast, Nana Visitor especially. Avery Brooks directed; it’s an old saw that actors-turned-directors get strong performances out of their casts, and this episode doesn’t dispute that. And the script’s... fine? I want to say fine. It’s better than the last Kira-centric episode, and there’s some legitimate pathos mined in the episode’s more overtly sentimental moments. Plus, Jeffrey Combs makes his triumphant

return as the not-quite-dead Weyoun (it's a clone thing), Gul Dukat is an ass, and Sisko gets to talk some smack.

On the downside, "Ties Of Blood And Water" feels perfunctory. But "perfunctory" is a questionable criticism, relying even more on eye-of-the-beholder assumptions than normal. There comes a point in the weekly-reviewing biz (he said, sipping a latte and idly fingering a pile of cocaine) when "good enough" isn't really good enough. It gets hard to dredge up interesting commentary, so you start to nitpick, and that doesn't make anyone happy.

Whining aside, let's focus on what works. The premise: Back in the third season's ["Second Skin,"](#) Kira was kidnapped by the Obsidian Order, made to look like a Cardassian, and stuck in the house of a prominent Cardassian official under the pretense that she was the official's daughter, back from a long undercover mission on Bajor. After a lot of shouting, Kira figured out that the Order didn't have designs on her, but was instead using her to discredit Tekeny Ghemor (Lawrence Pressman), the official who mistakes Kira for his missing child. That episode had a happy ending, and this sort-of sequel picks up with Ghemor returning to Deep Space Nine. Kira wants him to run a Cardassian government in exile, in opposition to Dukat, but Ghemor is dying. He offers to give up everything he knows about the Cardassian political system, and Kira agrees to depose him. But she's got some memories of her own to deal with—specifically, her own father's death, and how she handled it.

Kira stories work best when they have a clear emotional center, and it's hard to get much clearer than, "I abandoned my father because I couldn't face losing him." The Kira/Ghemor relationship seems willed into existence for the purpose of this story, but Visitor and Pressman sell what they're given, and the straightforward, undeniable sense of loss that runs throughout the episode is hard to deny. Ghemor gives Kira some sold intel on the Cardassian government (and Dukat's enemies), but none of it changes the fact that the dead are gone and the dying are going. Nor does it reunite Ghemor with his missing daughter, or kick Dukat out of his leadership role, or do anything but give our heroes some helpful tips, and allow Kira a chance at imperfect closure. The drama in the episode is muted, and that's all to the good; the power here comes not so much from tension (although there is one source of suspense), but from watching people we've come to care about accept once more the inevitabilities of their universe. Of all universes, really.

While Kira and Ghemor take center stage, "Ties Of Blood And Water" also brings back Weyoun, the magnificently smarmy bastard last seen in ["To The Death."](#) Funny thing: Weyoun was vaporized by his own troops at the end of that story, but here he is at Gul Dukat's side, snarking on the action and seemingly amused by everything. When Sisko, serving as an audience surrogate, acts surprised, Weyoun explains that the Weyoun Sisko saw killed was actually a clone—version four, to be exact, and the version we see in this episode (who survives the hour) is version five. This is the first we've heard of the Vorta's cloning procedures, but it makes enough sense to work, and Weyoun is such an excellent character that I'm grateful for any excuse to have him back. He and Dukat stick largely to the sidelines; they're on the station because Ghemor knows where some bodies are buried, and Dukat wants to bring the dying Cardassian back home. Sisko, unsurprisingly, doesn't give a damn what Dukat

wants, which means we get some fun, snippy exchanges between the two of them. Plus, Weyoun looks like he's having a hell of a time, commenting on the action as it unfolds without really caring how things work out. Dukat is all barely restrained contempt and veiled threats, but Weyoun, apparently, doesn't give a shit. Which makes sense. For the Vorta, Cardassia is just one more planet full of suckers to put up with. They're the mid-level bureaucrats, the just-following-orders managers. It's refreshing to see Weyoun enjoying himself in the middle of all this angst, and it also makes you wonder what will happen if he ever has to get serious.

So what doesn't work? As good as the actors are, Kira and Ghemor's relationship feels forced. Over and over we're told how Ghemor is like a second father to Kira, and that Kira is the only "family" he has left, but this is a character we haven't seen in two seasons; we haven't had sufficient time to build up an investment in the relationship. And it's not like Kira spent that much time as Ghemor's daughter. While the performances are good, their emotional impact is blunted by the lack of grounding, by the impossible to ignore sense that this entire situation has been contrived to generate the most pathos possible. *DS9* has never been one to shy away from melodrama, and maybe my reaction here is just needlessly harsh; maybe the show's rhythms have grown too predictable for me and I need a break. This is not a caveat I'll be using again in these reviews (because c'mon), but there were points watching "Ties Of Blood And Water" where I wondered if my already deeply subjective perspective hadn't completely lost sight of what mattered.

Because the story of Kira's father *does* work. Ghemor and his sudden death may be a means to an end, but that end is striking in its directness. Kira's father was fatally injured in a Cardassian attack, and instead of staying with him as he died, Kira went out to get revenge. When she learned her dad passed away while she was out shooting dudes, she left to shoot some more dudes. I appreciate the unforgiving simplicity of that, the way it implicates Kira without blaming her, and shows us yet another piece of what drove the Bajoran resistance: not just rage, not just a desire for justice, but the need to keep moving, to give yourself something to do in the face of loss. That's a strong, rich theme to work from, and maybe what really hurts is this episode has nothing to do with my assumptions, or anything about me. Maybe it's simply that the Ghemor framing device, even though it gives Kira a small chance to make up for the past, is never as effective as the idea it was created to support. Kira's dad is even more of a cipher than Ghemor, but he's less important than what he represents, and it's too bad there wasn't a more effective way to bring this all together.

Stray observations:

- This is as good a place as any: After we finish season five of *DS9*, I'll once again be taking a break from the show until the fall, to write about [Monty Python's Flying Circus](#). The fresh air should do me good.
- We had a bit of a Jeffrey Combs renaissance this week. I'm cool with that.
- "Immortality." "Of a sort. Interested?" —Quick exchange between Sisko and Weyoun that shows the latter hasn't lost a step.

- Kira’s wig in those flashbacks is something, isn’t it?
- I always appreciate it when a show is willing to let one of its heroes look bad, and Kira isn’t at her most sympathetic for much of this hour. Her near-refusal to see Ghemor before his death is a great irrational choice, because we understand why she’s doing it, even while we wish she wouldn’t.
- “Regardless of what Ghemor’s done in the past, he doesn’t deserve to die alone. Nobody does.”—Bashir doesn’t get a ton to do this hour, but what he gets is great.
- Kira’s monologue at the end, while redundant (it helps us understand her a little better, but we saw the story she tells unfold in flashback) is well-delivered.

“Ferengi Love Songs” (season five, episode 20; originally aired 4/21/1997)

In which you’d think we would have had enough of silly plotlines...

Well, at least this one warns you straight off in the title. It’s hard to think of a more unpromising combination of words; the cheeky reference to a terrible Paul McCartney song, the threat of another Ferengi-centric storyline so soon after **the last one**, the knowledge that *Trek* nearly always struggles when it tries to focus on romance. Who knows why it was necessary to tell this story, but at least the writers give you a chance to opt out early. Save yourself! Maybe there’ll be an Odo story next week.

I don’t have this luxury, so let’s push up some virtual sleeves and get to work. And the thing is, while I complain about the Ferengi, every hour we’ve spent with them is so, so much better than it could’ve been. I’m not a fan of “Ferengi Love Songs”; it gets better as it goes, but the first half has a lot of unfunny gags and really irritating over-scoring. But this isn’t as agonizing as some of [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#)’s comedic hours, and there’s a third-act twist I didn’t see coming that at least partially redeems what came before it. More importantly, Armin Shimerman is one of the show’s best actors, and he keeps finding ways to add a sense of stakes and reality to even the most outlandish concept. By now, *DS9*’s ensemble has settled into each other and their characters with gratifying effectiveness, but Shimerman has to work a little harder than others; he’s playing a character type that’s never been a regular on a *Trek* show before, his character’s race is one of the least endearing in the franchise, and he often has to shoulder the burden of the writers’ weakest comedic impulses. Sure, René Auberjonois is fantastic, but he regularly gets amazing material to work with. Shimerman is too often stuck with the dregs, but he always makes the most of it.

For a while, he’s the only reason worth watching “Ferengi Love Songs.” There’s a Rom/Leeta subplot, and it’s cute and everything, but like the last Rom/Leeta subplot, it’s all based on character stupidity, and that shit gets old. At least this time around, it’s all Rom’s fault; and, better still, Rom’s stupidity actually has something like a cultural and psychological basis. To wit: After a conversation with Dax and O’Brien, Rom decides he needs Leeta to give up all her property rights (a Ferengi tradition) before they can get married. Leeta is understandably upset about this, and the wedding is temporarily off,

but after Rom does some soul-searching (and gets some friendly advice from O'Brien), he decides to give up everything he owns to prove his love for Leeta, and so on and whatever. If you're invested in this relationship, this story is cute enough, and it's nice to see nice people being all nice and everything—but while I don't begrudge either character their happiness, the only real fun I had with this is watching Dax and O'Brien plant the seeds of Rom's downfall in his head at the beginning of the episode. It's almost as though the ostensibly good-natured heroes of the show like to spend their downtime fucking around with the heads of their employees.

All of that aside: Quark is once again struggling to keep his business afloat, and while the series typically uses this as an excuse to get laughs or to drive the character into questionable business arrangements, there is a definite empathy for his frustration and loneliness here, even when it's used as a punchline. While character-centric stories can be disappointing when you don't get the character you want ([Lost](#) fans: remember Kate episodes?), they do serve the invaluable purpose of enriching a show's multitudes of perspective. Most of the time, Quark is a secondary figure, a background irritant that occasionally gets in the way of the more serious plots. When we shift to Quark's perspective, some of the inherent prejudice against the character stays with us; I'd love a rich, dramatic hour focusing on his struggles to forge a new life, but I'm not holding my breath. But there's still the realization that he's got his own stuff going on, and that stuff matters to him, even if it doesn't directly relate to the Dominion War, or Odo's love life, or Bashir's genetic engineering. Empathy is one of the most important aims of art, and as clumsy and frustrating as the Ferengi stuff can be, it's still possible to appreciate that the writers are trying to accomplish.

At Rom's suggestion, Quark decides to return to Ferenginar and spend some quality time with his mother. As a character choice goes, this is pretty nifty; after all his complaining over her rebellious ways (clothes-wearing, profit-earning, that sort of thing), he still knows she's the best person to turn to in a crisis. And the fact that she's actually busy working on her own thing when Quark shows up is a nice touch as well. Kids want their parents to be available when they need them, and invisible when they don't, and Quark is no exception. The fact that his mom is still clearly wearing clothes and making money is awkward, but her willingness to provide a much needed hug is not. But then Quark finds out that Mom has a new boyfriend, and that boyfriend is the Grand Nagus Zek, and everything goes to hell.

Andrea Martin originated the role of Ishka in the third season's "[Family Business](#)," but Cecily Adams takes over for her here, and the switch is disappointing. Martin brought a warmth and energy to the part that Adams can't match, and that makes the character's scenes with Quark less affecting. Wallace Shawn is back in the makeup as Zek, but the romantic business between Ishka and the Nagus isn't anywhere near as funny as it needs to be to make the middle of this episode work. Their relationship makes the Ferengi home world seem smaller than it was before. Admittedly, this is just how TV shows tend to work: Quark is a main character, so if Zek is going to hook up with a woman, it's just more convenient that he hooks up with Quark's mom, thus generating more story possibilities in the process. And we know that Ishka is a strong, smart woman, which, Ferengi culture notwithstanding, is bound to attract a powerful man. (Plus, there's Zek's fading memory, but we'll get to that.) But the

whole thing just seems so tossed-off, designed more to make Quark suffer than to enrich the show's universe. If this whole thing turned out to be a bad nightmare of Quark's, I wouldn't have been surprised; Brunt's arrival just seals the deal.

A pileup of awfulness can work, but there's no rising tension to any of this, or comedic momentum. The problem comes down to a lack of stakes. While Shimerman does a good job selling Quark's misery and loneliness, the writers never seem to take his financial troubles all that seriously; intellectually, we can understand that a Ferengi without wealth or a way of getting wealthy is in a special kind of Hell, but given how much of the *Trek* franchise is dedicated to painting material greed as inherently corrupt and valueless, it's hard to know what to root for. In a way, this is part of what makes Quark fascinating—he's someone we like whose values are completely at odds with the values the rest of the show espouses. But it kills the comedy in stories like this, because there's no weight to any of it. Brunt getting Quark to break up his mother and the Nagus is a plot out of a TGIF sitcom, and while Quark's immediate willingness to go along with the plan is a nice reminder that he's no goody two-shoes, the whole arc is as weightless as Rom and Leeta's temporary estrangement. There's a sense that none of this needs to be taken seriously, and, counterintuitive or not, that kills the comedy dead. If the writers are just dicking around for 40 minutes, why should we care?

As I said, the story picks a bit in the last act, largely because it takes a turn I wasn't expecting: Instead of leaning heavy on Ishka's sadness over the broken-up relationship (which would then have forced Quark to act on his conscience and do the right thing), the story finds the Grand Nagus struggling to remember key details about the Ferengi economy. Quark soon realizes that Zek's memory is slipping, and that the only reason the whole system hasn't collapsed in recent months is that Moogie has been picking up the slack. While this twist doesn't suddenly turn the episode into a meditation on the fragility of consciousness, it does give us enough plot to push through the final 15 minutes with minimal scarring. The whole thing goes from unfunny and tedious to fleet and—okay, still not really funny, but the fleetness helps a lot. The big resolution is anything but: The climax happens offscreen, with Quark using Ishka's advice to help Zek defeat Brunt's F.C.A. questioners. (This whole thing is a Brunt plan to take over the Nagus position, which could be fun if it keeps happening.) Then Quark reunites Zek and Ishka, and everything's fine. Again, like Rom and Leeta, the drama is really just a matter of a protagonist realizing he has to stop being an idiot, but at least Rom gave up all his money. In the end, Quark gets his business license back, and he gets his action figures back, and we get the end credits, which is pretty much all I wanted.

Stray observations:

- The voles are back! Damn voles.
- I think somebody must have stolen Ferenginar from a Dr. Seuss illustration.
- Quark's speech about developing a conscience is pretty great.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Soldiers Of The Empire”/“Children Of Time”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[6/06/13 10:00AM](#)

“Soldiers Of The Empire” (season five, episode 21; originally aired 4/28/1997)

In which Worf has to lose a battle to win the war...

Worf is a character who depends on context. On his own, he can come across as a stick-in-the-mud, an uptight schoolmarm who just happens to be capable of splitting you in two if he really gets mad. Rule-obsessed scolds can be legitimately compelling, but they need to have some justification for why they behave the way they do; everyone’s more interesting if we can understand where they’re coming from, and, at his worst, Worf is just a helpless, irritable square, useful to bounce jokes off of, but not much else. In context, though, he’s immensely compelling: a tragic figure cast aside by his own people for striving to serve their interests. As goofy as that “My enthusiasm killed a kid” speech was back on the episode we’re not going to talk about again, it speaks to a conflict at Worf’s heart, the struggle that defines the Klingon soul. Battle and honor above all things, but where does that lead you in the end? How do you balance the responsibilities of citizenship against a warrior’s ethos? Worf is fascinating because he’s an example of one of the best approaches to genre storytelling: Take your concepts seriously. Try to figure out what happens next. “Warrior culture” is an okay start, but what does that mean? How does this system work, and how can it be maintained?

On one level, “Soldiers Of The Empire” is an exciting, well-paced underdog saga; a bit like one of those sports movies where a team of losers has to band together in order to triumph, only here the “losers”

are a near mutinous crew of Klingons, and triumphing means killing the hell out of a Jem'Hadar ship and its crew. This is a formula, to be sure, but it's the kind of formula with a basic, undeniable power no matter how many times its re-used. Ron Moore's script takes the model, and runs with it, building to the rousing climax that's all the more impressive when you realize we never see what's typically considered the most important part of the story: the final battle. Martok and his crew finally destroy an enemy ship, but all we get to watch is their triumphant return to DS9. But the story still feels complete, because the *B'Moth's* first victory isn't really what's at stake. Intentionally or not, this episode is really about trying once more to put Worf in the appropriate context, and undo some of the damage done in the season's worst moments. Whether or not Martok is able to overcome his self-doubt is important, but what matters more is whether or not Worf can find a solution to his dilemma that will be true both to his own beliefs, and to the needs of those around him.

That said, the Dax/Worf relationship remains frustratingly unthrilling, in a way that makes me question what we should expect out of a TV romance. Putting these two together is both a way to help integrate Worf into the cast, and a potential story generator for future episodes, but while it makes a certain, "opposites-attract"-style sense, it rarely rises above the level of perfunctory. The chemistry is flat, but then, it's hard to pin down exactly what "chemistry" is supposed to mean in this circumstances. Some couples have a bubbly, live-wire energy that turns their sparring into a prime reason for tuning into a show, but Worf and Dax aren't supposed to be [Sam and Diane](#), or [Nick and Jess](#), or whatever will-they/won't-they comes to mind. They obviously would, have, and will keep doing so for the foreseeable future. And while the relationship can seem questionable from time to time, well, all relationships can look that way to outsiders. Maybe it makes sense just to accept the two of them together as a done deal, and hope the writers never make the mistake of putting too much drama on the pairing itself.

"Soldiers Of The Empire" is a good example of how to make that work; sure, Dax decides to accompany Worf during his time on board the *B'Moth*, but while she's motivated in no small part by her feelings for him, we've always seen her hold her own with Klingons before, and this is no exception. While the passion underlying their pairing doesn't always translate to the screen, it can still make sense, and to the extent that this a "Worf and Dax" episode, they do make sense.

But then, this isn't really about them: It's about Worf, ultimately, but to get to that, we have get through Martok and his newly adopted crew, and how both sides represent a study in what happens when you lose your way in a warrior culture. It's an irony that Martok spends most of the episode alienating himself from the people he's supposed to inspire, because the reasons that make him so cautious and initially incapable of doing his damn job are at least partly connected to what makes those serving under him so skittish about doing theirs. We've seen Klingons struggling to redefine themselves against the Dominion threat, but here we get a sense of what's really driving them: fear and loathing of the Jem'Hadar. Martok spent long months in a prison camp suffering at their hands, and his new crew have lost battles to them in the past, but if they were just another enemy, like the Cardassians or the Romulans or the humans, such struggles, while difficult, would not sting quite so much. The Jem'Hadar are different, and here's where we see a fatal flaw in the Klingon way of life.

The way to be a great Klingon, male or female, is to be a great warrior—the greatest warrior, in fact. To be defined by your will to victory, your indomitable spirit, your thirst for righteous violence—it’s basically Manifest Destiny, only nobody’s ashamed about all the killing that comes with it. But here are the Jem’Hadar, built faster, stronger, more able to endure. To a race whose highest ideal is the purity of the hunt, this must be horrifying: a species that has no other purpose than to make war, no desire but to follow orders, kill, follow more orders, and die. It’s unnatural, and Martok and his people try and calm themselves by pointing this out, but that sounds like equivocation. When your way of life has elevated Might Makes Right to a form of art, eventually, you’ll be faced with an enemy who redefines the terms. This isn’t the first time the Klingons have dealt with an opponent that can beat them, but it’s maybe the first time they’ve faced one that can do so on the Klingons’ own terms. That’s got to sting.

Which is why the climax of the story is so appealing. Martok keeps stalling and avoiding confrontations, the crew keeps getting closer to mutiny, and finally, Worf realizes something has to be done. He challenges Martok for leadership, and on a Klingon ship, if the superior officer refuses to stand down in the face of such a challenge, it’s a fight to the death. (We first learned about this in [“Matter Of Honor,”](#) from the second season of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.) Worf and Martok fight, and at a critical moment, Worf lets down his guard, allowing Martok to win. The victory restores Martok’s confidence, allowing him to realize he’s been hiding from his true duties, and when a Jem’Hadar ship does approach, the general is able to lead his crew proudly, neatly resolving the episode’s main source of dramatic tension.

So, Worf threw the fight. On a personal level, this reminds us that Worf is a lot cannier than he sometimes lets on, as he understood the one gesture that might be able to bring about a positive resolution for both of the parties (Martok and the crew) that he needed to serve; he also was willing to put his own life at hazard, knowing there was no guarantee that Martok wouldn’t take the killing blow when Worf allowed him the opportunity to do so. But on a greater level, Worf’s actions are a reminder of what sets apart the Klingons from the Jem’Hadar, and what makes their philosophy, at best, a noble one. While the Jem’Hadar talk about honor, and clearly have a deep reverence for it, they are ultimately at the whims of their controllers; their actions are stripped of any choice, and those few times we have seen them exert their will have required acts of highly localized rebellion. For Klingons, though, choice is the highest expression of honor, and the willingness to engage, to fight to the last, matters because it always comes internally. Time and again, Worf has demonstrated the best way forward for the Klingon Empire: courage, resilience, and passion driven by wisdom. His fight against the Jem’Hadar earlier in the season (a fight that’s referenced in this episode) showed that it’s possible to defeat even the seemingly invincible, and his actions here confirm it. Martok offering to adopt Worf into his house, and Worf accepting, is a thrilling, moving gesture, and it makes sense: Worf may be a jerk sometimes, but in context, he’s the future. The empire would do well to realize that.

Stray observations:

- The chat between Martok and Bashir at the beginning (Martok was injured in a “holosuite program,” which we later learn is a lie to cover a training fight with Worf) is great. I love how Bashir’s refusal to back down first annoys, and then ultimately endears him to Martok.
- There’s a war song we hear twice on the ship: first, when Worf starts it up, and then later when the crew gets it going in response to Martok’s victory, signaling their acceptance of him as their leader. It’s pretty good!
- Not showing us the big fight against the Jem’Hadar is a really smart move, as it makes sure the focus stays on the Worf/Martok fight.

“Children Of Time” (season five, episode 22; originally aired 5/5/1997)

In which Kira learns a truth...

One of the great assets of genre storytelling is that it allows writers to create unique situations that reveal basic truths. There’s no real world analog for the crisis Sisko and his crew face in “Children Of Time”; the closest you can get would be debating whether or not to have kids, and then somehow feeling personally responsible to all the kids you decide not to have, but even that doesn’t come close.

In “Children Of Time,” the *Defiant* checks in on a planet surrounded by your standard plot-bearing plasma field, and meet a small but thriving civilization of about 8,000 people. To their shock, the people of this civilization recognize Sisko and the others, right down to the first names and personal habits. But the worst is yet to come. There’s time travel here, and the basic gist is, due to the plasma-whatsit surrounding the planet, when Sisko and the others try to leave, they’re going to crash; and more, it’s a crash that will send them and their ship 200 years into the past. In the past, the survivors of the crash (and not everyone survives) will found a colony that will eventually flourish and lead to the 8,000 people that we see in the present. So, now that they know what will happen, Sisko, Kira, O’Brien, and the rest have a choice to make. Do they recreate the crash, and spend the rest of their lives marooned two centuries away from their families? Or do they avoid the anomaly, and wipe an entire history of lives from existence?

It’s an impossible question, really, and while impossible questions often serve as the source of great drama, what’s interesting here is how the characters react, and not the why the issue itself resolves. Because, resolution-wise, there aren’t a lot of options. The show’s main ensemble (minus Quark) is not going to get stranded 200 years in the past; for a while, there’s some hope that the present day *Defiant* will be able to create a kind of quantum duplicate as it leaves, thus allowing the characters to be in two places at once, but that solution turns out to be a lie cooked up by Yedrin Dax, a descendant of Jadzia’s and current host for the Dax symbiont. And really, it would have to be a lie, wouldn’t it? Watching everybody hang out with their potential descendants for a while before leaving everything just the way it was would be a cheat, making a situation too easy and robbing it of its potential effect.

The possibility of a happy ending lets the writers delay the inevitable for a little while longer, but once that possibility is taken off the table, it all comes down to why you make your choices, and not what those choices are.

It's possible to see this in the design of the community on the planet. This is just one more in a long line of agrarian *Star Trek* utopias, where a small group of respectful individuals join together for the greater good. There are some tweaks here and there; as mentioned, Dax is still around (Bashir and his children must've gotten really good at Trill biology), and there's a group of warriors who stand apart from the rest of society, vowing to follow the Klingon way as the future-past version of Worf once set down. But for the most part, if you've watched enough [*Star Trek: The Next Generation*](#) and *DS9*, this is familiar, and not all that distinctive.

Not that it needs to be. Maybe the ending of the episode might've had more impact if the people we ultimately lose were more distinctive, but I'm not sure that's possible; the ending is shocking as it is, and it's powerful because of what it reveals about the people (particularly one person) who will be staying with the show for the duration. As it is, the people of the settlement are as interesting as they need to be. There are some lovely scenes showing how the main ensemble grows attached to these fleeting figures, like Sisko meeting a baby, or the planting sequence which serves as a sort of inadvertent farewell, but by and large, the community remains a symbol, a sort of narrative sacrifice. They're here to be lost.

So that leaves the regular cast to shoulder most of the weight of the episode. The script does a good job of giving everyone a moment or two. Dax, whose eagerness to explore the uncharted world is at least partly responsible for creating this whole mess, has to face what her shortsightedness has led to, both good and bad, and how her actions have shaped the Dax symbiont; Yedrin is so desperate to make up for his past mistakes, and to protect the people he cares about, that he's willing to betray everyone Jadzia loves. (Actually, that's pretty defensible; when you're given a choice between "8,000 people cease to exist" and "48 people are stranded," it's not a tough call. The major mistake on his part is not being up front about the situation.) O'Brien discovers that his future-past self remarries a year or two after the crash. When it comes time to make the ultimate decision, he's the only member of the crew dead set against staying behind; he's got a wife and two kids to worry about, after all. But when faced with the depth and warmth of the people he'd be effectively erasing from reality, he can't bring himself to go through with it.

None of them can, really, which makes sense. In a way, that arguably cheapens the drama of the question, because no person in good conscience could be expected to turn their backs on 8,000 people, especially when doing so meant not just killing them, but negating them and everyone who came before. This is where the dramatic value of genre fiction can get tricky, because this is the kind of dilemma that's almost too one-sided to really debate. Sisko and O'Brien pay some lip service to the idea that no one can force them to make this choice, but "force" is beside the point. If any of our heroes had really been willing to commit this level of temporal genocide, it would've been hard to accept. On *DS9*, characters often make hard-to-accept choices, but this is beyond the pale.

But that leaves the story in a tough spot, because to wrap all of this up with some kind of deus ex machina would kill be to kill its power; there's tragedy built into this model, but in order for it to land, someone needs to make that impossible choice. Which is why we have Kira and Odo. Kira is injured during the initial pass through the plasma whatsit, and while she looks and feels fine, Yedrin explains that in the community's history, Kira died a week or so after being marooned on the planet; the shock she received earlier damaged her neural pathways severely enough to prove fatal. It's not something that Bashir can cure without equipment he has back on the station. That means the problem Sisko and the others face has more of a bite to it: are they willing to sacrifice Kira to save the others? But it's still a question with only one morally justifiable answer. If Kira hadn't been willing to die, then we might have had something (because really, who could blame her?), but after some soul searching, she decides that her death is the will of the Prophets. She can accept that; and as terrible as it would be to die, at least she can go knowing her sacrifice will save thousands.

Then there's Odo. After a cold open which has Kira revealing she's broken up with Shakaar, and Odo being stunned by the news, the shapechanger gets dumped in a jar for most of the rest of the episode. It seems like a bizarre choice; why even include him at all, if he's just going to be written out for vague science-fiction reasons. Turns out there's a reason for that. While everyone else is hanging out in the community, meeting their great great-great-great-(etc.)-grandchildren, Kira is accosted by another, much older Odo. This is the Odo who survived the crash, the sole remnant of that crew still alive on the planet, and time has changed him. He's gotten better at shape-shifting, for one; he looks more like Rene Auberjonois now, and the effect is both marvelous and unnerving, like running into a visitor from the uncanny valley in real life. More importantly, the centuries, and the loss of that other Kira so long ago, have changed him profoundly. He seems more at peace with himself, and with his feelings, and a few minutes into his first conversation with our Kira, he lets go of the secret the present day Odo has seemingly devoted his life to keeping: He tells her he loves her.

It's a shocking moment, and it reveals something fundamentally curious about the future-past Odo, something the episode goes to great pains to neither condemn nor praise. This Odo's lack of restraint and apparent self-confidence are gratifying in a way, but there's a sense that he's lost perspective on the being he used to be, and, in doing so, has lost what little connection he had left to the living people around him. It's subtle, and it may not even be intentional, but we only ever see the future-past Odo with Kira; he's never mentioned by the other members of the community, and we never see him interacting with them or the rest of the crew. As warm and vibrant as this society is, Odo is on the outside, like he always was. Without Kira, there's nothing to tie him down. Maybe after she died, he was so grief-stricken he left the others behind, wandering the planet on his own, changing shapes and forgetting who he was; and when he returned, all the others he'd know were dead, and there were just strangers, and he couldn't bear the thought of caring for them.

Whatever the reason, he's apart, and so, when he realizes the Defiant is going to crash voluntarily, and Kira is going to die again, he takes action, changing the flight path, and sending the ship back out into space. It's an act so immense, so apparently monstrous and yet deeply personal that it's almost impossible to judge. He erased himself, and all those 8,000 souls, for one woman. Because he loved

her. There's something terrifying in that kind of love, something that asks for so much it can't possible be returned, or ignored. All that time on his own, dealing with loss, shaping his feelings and knowing that one day, Kira would come back, and that when she did, he could see her again, and maybe even save her... it changed him. And our Odo, present day Odo, the guy who's been stuck in a jar this whole time, who's struggled to do the right thing and protect himself and uphold the law, is forced to relay the news to the person who's opinion of him matters to him the most. That's what really stings: future-past Odo wanted Kira to know what he was willing to do to keep her alive. And now they both know.

Stray observations:

- Okay, so it's an "energy barrier with quantum fluctuations," not a plasma whatsit. Doesn't really matter.
- That ending really is stunning. It gives us what we want (yay, our heroes are leaving the planet! Yay, Kira lives! Yay, Kira knows Odo loves her!) in the worst way possible.
- Continuing the Worf Is Awesome theme, the scene when he tells his followers to help the other villagers with the planting is great. "Time is there enemy. We should help them defeat it." Really, that whole sequence is wonderful, and manages to do in a few minutes what most of the rest of the episode struggles with; just the sight of these people calmly, even joyously, going about their work while many of them know it will all vanish soon, makes them matter.

Next week: Sisko has to team up with an enemy in "Blaze Of Glory," and the Cardassians mess with everyone's life in "Empok Nor."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Blaze Of Glory”/“Empok Nor”

[Zack Handlen](#)

[6/13/13 10:00AM](#)

“Blaze Of Glory” (season 5, episode 23; originally aired 5/12/1997)

In which Eddington goes down in a—wait for it...

Did Eddington have to die? From a story perspective, I’d say no, not really; while his betrayal of his duties and decision to join up with the Maquis was shocking, it wasn’t such a wrenching horror that it needed a fatality to balance the equation. Sisko’s obsessive pursuit ended up putting the man behind bars, and that would’ve been a perfectly reasonable place to leave it, with Eddington jailed and forced to watch as his former friends are hunted down and killed. The character was a good one (a bit of a cipher, but his sudden heel turn made him much more interesting), but not so memorable as to require a more definitive resolution than “He lost.” Structurally, he was used most effectively as a goad for his nemesis, a way to show Sisko in a determined, slightly less flattering light. Basically, he was never the main character of this tale, and not even a show-stealing secondary figure like Garak. He had a function, and he served it, and no more was required. I even feel like this paragraph explaining things is getting redundant.

But psychologically speaking? Yeah, he had to go. While it’s a trait that was only really established in [“For The Uniform”](#) and this episode, Eddington was someone who had molded his life to fit a very specific kind of arc. Sisko used this against him in their previous confrontation, reasoning that Eddington had a deep, unshakable need to be the hero; exploiting that need made him vulnerable. It’s

a nifty concept, made all the more intriguing by how little the show seems to judge him for his apparent narcissism. Sisko is dismissive of Eddington's political beliefs, and we usually trust Sisko, but this case is a cloudy one; the captain's judgement is questionable, if only because it's obvious that Eddington drives him up a fucking wall. Eddington is a self-righteous twerp, and yet, while I'd be willing to bet that the writers were much more sympathetic to Sisko's point of view, Eddington gets to fulfill his self-assumed destiny. He gets to play the tragic hero, doomed to see much of what he loves destroyed, but able in his last moments to save some small remnant of that which he strove to protect. And then he gets shot a lot and dies.

It's all built on a twist that plays with our expectations of how cold opens work; the real meat of the episode is the verbal sparring between its two leads, but it's clever how long the episode is able to string us along with what turns out to be utter bullshit. In the opening scenes, Martok brings an intercepted communication to Sisko, a video message addressed to "Michael" from an apparent Maquis member, telling "Michael" that the missiles have been launched. As Martok explains, the Klingon Empire had briefly teamed up with the Maquis to try and use them against the Cardassians, giving them cloaking devices which could have potentially been attached to weapons, making those weapons impossible to detect as they soared through space. With what Sisko already knows about the Maquis's equipment, he realizes it would be possible for the group to launch an unstoppable attack on Cardassia, killing millions of civilians, and almost certainly pissing off the Dominion enough to start a war.

This is all fake, a ruse concocted by Eddington and his people to give them a last chance out should things take a turn for the worse. As a reveal, it happens a little too quickly to be more powerful than a "Oh. Huh," moment, but it's impressive in retrospect how obvious the phoniness of that "missile" story really was. There was just enough plausibility to ensure that Sisko had to get involved, and that he had to contact Eddington (Michael Eddington, to be sure), and that he had to then take Eddington to where Eddington needed to go without realizing what he was doing. But when you think about it, a single intercepted communication can mean just about anything. With Martok's reveal about the cloaking devices (a nice, casual reminder about just how confusing all of this can be; your friends were once your enemies, your enemies may know your friends), the whole situation becomes critical even though there's really no concrete reason to believe that message was telling the truth. The Maquis have gone to extremes before, but they aren't monsters, and they aren't fools. But Eddington manages to create a story that makes it look like they could be.

The middle of the episode is a chunk of screentime with Sisko and Eddington stuck on a runabout together, bantering back and forth and threatening to kill each other as you do. Both actors have a heightened performance style, with Sisko's off-beat theatricality playing against Eddington's Agent Smith-like over-enunciation in ways that, while a little exhausting, are nonetheless entertaining to watch. As with their previous conflicts, the psychological depths of these exchanges is less important than the energy with which both sides rant. Sometimes, outside perspectives can offer fresh insight on recurring characters, but here, Eddington's assumptions about what drives Sisko come across as one more smoke screen, one more layer of narrative trickery. Sisko's remarks—about how Eddington's ego

helped destroy the Maquis, by promising them more than they could hope to achieve—seem a little more dead on, although even then, it's not like anyone could've seen the Dominion/Cardassian team-up coming. (Well, apart from Sisko in his magic prophet dreams.) But mostly, this just plays like theater. Sisko's the tough cop who needs help from the crook he helped put away; Eddington is the crook, still seething over the injustice that landed him behind bars. Even Eddington's promise to kill Sisko once their partnership concludes plays feels rote.

But maybe that's just another part of the fake plot; Eddington so clearly relishes his role as a real life Dungeonmaster that it's not hard to imagine him trying to embellish the script with a few touches he picked up off of old pulp fiction. "Blaze Of Glory" works best as a farewell to a character who only became interesting when he decided to reshape his own plotline, a working drudge who barely registered on audiences until the writers decided to let him re-invent himself. While there's some tragedy here—Eddington's wife (he has a wife) looks very sad at the end, and there are a lot of dead Maquis in that Jem'Hadar infested base—the tragedy doesn't land as hard as that feeling of meta construction, of an end built out of the spare parts of a dozen similar bad-ass conclusions. I doubt Eddington went to rescue his friends and loved ones with the intention of sacrifice himself for their safety, but notice how quickly he's willing to stay behind after getting shot. Sure, he's probably right. He probably would've slowed the others down. But like so much of the rest of the episode, that choice was made long before the situation ever arose. Eddington knew his story, and he stuck to it. In a way, he won, although that doesn't make him less dead.

Stray observations:

- This week's minor subplot: Nog believes the Klingons don't respect him, Sisko suggests confronting them about it, Nog does, and Martok starts calling him "Cadet" instead of ignoring he exists. Very minor stuff indeed, with a nicely low-key ending that fits in loosely with the episode theme of forcing your own view of yourself on the world. Nog feels he's worthy of respect, and even if not everyone agrees, he'll be damned if he accepts it.
- The Badlands that Sisko and Eddington fly through on their way to the former Maquis base looked pretty darn cool.
- There's a reference to Morn going crazy after Quark starts openly worrying about the future of the station. A decent joke that also suggests how tense things are becoming on DS9; even though the missile threat is a hoax, the Dominion is still out there, and war is still most likely on its way.
- Cal Hudson, Sisko's friend who turned out to be part of the Maquis in the second season, is dead.
- Midway through the episode, Eddington asks Sisko if he still has Eddington's a coin, his "lucky loonie." As casual banter goes, it's very random; I only note it here in case for some strange reason the damn things comes up again, and makes me look like a genius for noticing it.
- "In a way, he was the most loyal man I ever met." -Sisko on Eddington

“Empok Nor” (season 5, episode 24; originally aired 5/19/1997)*In which Garak gets high and O’Brien suffers for it...*

Here’s another episode whose set up, in broad outlines, could easily have been used on a different Trek series (just off the top of my head, I can remember [Next Generation](#) turned Worf into a monster in “[Genesis](#)”), but is helped considerably by the choice of characters involved, the history they share, and the history of the show in general. A stalk-in-the-dark horror/sci-fi piece with a surprisingly high body count, “Empok Nor” is creepy, thrilling, and horrifying by turns; the script’s only real failing is in a refusal to go much deeper under the surface of its premise than tension requires. This is, if you can get past the murders and the reminder of the lengths the Cardassian government will go to get the most out of its soldiers, a simple story. Expecting to find a station full of booby traps, O’Brien and his team find, instead, a science experiment gone wrong, one that inadvertently turns Garak from secretive but largely trustworthy ally into a homicidal monster. That’s pretty much it, and, give or take a few deaths, it unfolds about as you’d expect.

About those deaths: fans of the original series know that the franchise has a long history of killing off expendable grunts in order to make the main threat seem more, well, threatening. This practice was eschewed somewhat for *TNG*, but *DS9* has been more than willing to kill for the sake of good storytelling. The main difference being, this show puts a bit more effort in to making sure the soon to be dead have just enough personality to trick you into thinking they might not die. This works especially well in “Empok Nor,” or at least it did on me; no one in the group O’Brien takes to the abandoned Cardassian space station is a familiar face, and none of them get much more than a quick sketch of personality, but watching them get taken down one by one is still a shock, leading up to the moment when Garak, having taken out what appeared to be this week’s monster, turns into the monster himself. This is almost too much, especially considering the pains the writers had gone to earlier in the season to establish. There’s little to separate Pechetti, Stolzoff, Boq’Ta and the rest from the usual grist to the mill; they are essentially cannon fodder. But that little difference is enough to change the tone of the episode, especially the final exchange between O’Brien and Garak which, rather than make any of the story’s themes explicit, simply serves as a reminder of what’s been lost.

Still, as sad as it is to see all those nearly nameless warm bodies get murderized, the real heart of the episode is the sparring between its two leads. This is where the script comes close to getting past the surface premise. O’Brien is doing work in Quark’s bar, when he discovers he needs a special kind of equipment to finish his repairs, and the only real place to get that piece of equipment is from Empok Nor, a nearby abandoned Cardassian station. Because Cardassians typically booby-trap their stations before leaving, Sisko convinces Garak to go along for the trip, on the assumption that the tailor will be able to dismantle any serious threat O’Brien and his team discover. Not a bad way into the meat of the plot, although it does raise the question of just how important that particular piece of equipment O’Brien needed was. Given how bad things got the last time someone stumbled over a Cardassian trap, it would’ve been nice to have a little more pressure on O’Brien to come up with the necessary fix.

The back and forth between Garak and O'Brien starts friendly enough, but as is so often the case with Garak, things get complicated. Even before he's affected with the psychotropic drug that turns him into a killing machine, Garak is needling O'Brien about his time as a soldier, in that playful way Garak has where you can't be entirely sure how much he's kidding. This sets up subtext that turns deadly later on: the way war turns soldiers into unquestioning killers, and how certain kinds of behavior are permissible in combat that would not be acceptable in polite society. While Empok Nor has a few traps waiting for the engineering team, it's biggest trick is the two frozen Cardassian soldiers lying in wait, heavily dosed with a substance that makes them into violent xenophobes. Even more than usual, even. It's a freakishly plausible idea: the Cardassian government, looking to make their armies even more effective, developed a way to rise their hatred of the enemy to an almost blinding rage. While the episode doesn't explicitly reference it, if you remember, O'Brien did have a bit of a history of hating on Cardassians just for being Cardassian. He's mellowed in his years on the station, but there's still that lingering uncertainty between him and Garak, and this crisis just brings that uncertainty out into the open.

And yet, as much as I dig, I can't help but feel there really isn't all that much going on in this one. The stalk and kill sequences are spooky enough, although having seen hundreds of similar sequences before, the bloom is off the rose by now for me. The episode does make great use of the eerie, underlit corridors of Empok Nor, a place that looks a lot like DS9 but is just off enough that you keep wondering where all the corners are, and who might jump of them. Garak's transition from his chipper, duplicitous self to someone much grimmer and kill-happy is effectively done, and while the cause of his transformation is pretty obvious (that blue goo he sticks his hand on early in the hour, in a kind of "Oh, I guess this doesn't mean anything" way that you know is going to come back later), it isn't underlined. Garak's craziness develops in ways that are subtle enough to make you feel clever for catching on to them, like how he starts sweating, and rubbing his neck, and loses his cool. And the moment when Garak finally goes from suspicious to outright villain is surprising, because it's such a definitive, hopeless kind of reversal. Yay, the danger is gone! Oh no, now it's something worse and I'm dead!

Garak's fight against O'Brien is mildly disappointing, though, if only because it's so prosaic. Garak kidnaps Nog, and O'Brien rigs his equipment to explode during their mano a mano confrontation, and that's everything. I'm glad Garak survived, and I appreciate that nod I mentioned earlier to the hard facts of what happened; when O'Brien visits Garak in Sick Bay back on Deep Space 9, both men are clearly uncomfortable, but Garak asks O'Brien to send his condolences to the widow of the man he killed. In what is, for the most part, a minor but solid entry, that's a good bit of realism, reminding us that just because we won't think about any of those dead folks again, in the world of the show, they will be missed. Oh, and when Garak thanks O'Brien for not killing him, O'Brien admits (a little abashed, but not ashamed of himself) that the plan was to kill him, to which Garak can only nod understandingly. Maybe the only real message here is that in battle, survival is all that matters, so it's a good idea to try and avoid battle as much as possible.

Stray observations:

- No subplots this time, although Pechetti's interest in Cardassian insignia had me thinking of people who collect Nazi memorabilia. You were a strange one, Perchetti.
- Interesting that Garak went to kill the Cardassian soldiers first. The last remnants of his sanity holding sway? Or did the drug simply make him hate everyone for different reasons?
- "You're right. I'm an engineer." An engineer who uses an explosion to defeat his enemy, but hey, the tools at hand, I guess.

Next week: We close out the fifth season (sniff) with "In The Cards" and "Call To Arms."

[Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “In The Cards”/“Call To Arms”](#)[Zack Handlen](#)[6/20/13 10:00AM](#)**“In The Cards” (season five, episode 25; originally aired 6/9/1997)***In which Jake swings for the fences...*

One of the things nobody tells you about relationships: When the person you love suffers, you suffer too. In theory, this should be obvious. You care about someone, be it your lover or your best friend or your father, you want them to be happy, and you get bummed when they aren't. But it's more insidious than that, because when you watch someone else be depressed or stressed or frustrated, you not only feel bad for them—you feel like it's your job to do something about it. Even when, as in most cases, just being supportive and kind is enough, you want to find some concrete way of relieving that misery. You're helpless, because you can't force someone to be in a better mood, no matter how much you might want to. (With the best of intentions, of course.) When Jake sees his dad all tied up in knots, obsessing over the various angles of the Dominion threat, he gets upset about it, like any loving son would. And when an opportunity presents itself to add a little brightness to Benjamin Sisko's day, he jumps at it; and he keeps pushing forward, even when common sense (and maybe even a few laws) suggest he should let it go.

But there's wisdom in his desperation, and it's the wisdom that pushes us towards the episode's unexpectedly warm conclusion. “In the Cards” is a “comedic” episode of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, a designation that tends to bode ill for the hour ahead. We talked about this some in the [last Ferengi-](#)

[centric entry](#), but to reiterate: It's all about stakes. The problem with intentionally setting out to write episodes that are funny and episodes that are dramatic is that you're telling your audience from the outset that some storylines count less. I'm not saying drama is more important than comedy; I'm saying that in narrative television, the "serious" entries are usually the ones that have the most story movement, where the big twists happen, where the consequences live. Recognizing the signs of a jokey storyline (and they aren't that hard to recognize) takes the pressure off, which kills a lot of the comedy. At their worst, "funny" *Trek* is a waste of time, and it must've been a bummer to get some of these episodes when the show was airing week to week. Nothing kills laughter like disappointment.

Thankfully, "In The Cards" is pretty great, largely because the humor rises from deeply serious, even terrifying, concerns. Sisko's worries over the future of the station, and the threat the combined forces of Cardassia and the Dominion represent, aren't paranoid fantasy. Slowly but surely, the past season has been tightening the noose around all of our favorite characters' throats, and now that the end is coming, there's no more denying the inevitable. There will be war, and if our heroes don't find a way to fight it, things could go very badly indeed. The Jem'Hadar are a formidable fighting force; the Vorta (Weyoun is back this week, huzzah!) are brilliant diplomats and manipulators; and the Founders themselves have an uncanny knack for planning out strategy multiple moves in advance. This is not something that can be handled in a two-parter and then never spoken of again. Big, bad news is coming no matter what Jake, Nog, or anyone else does.

Almost paradoxically, the seeming pointlessness of Jake's quest makes it that much more entertaining to watch. Which would seem to go against all that stakes talk I mentioned above (it wouldn't change much of anything if Jake never got that card), but the thing is, the stakes are still important, even if Benjamin Sisko's son can't really do much about them. More importantly, the immediate stakes for Jake are utterly critical. There are dire times ahead, and the boy's desire to brighten, if only for a few moments, his old man's day, creates a pressing goal for the story to resolve, one that fits in with the episode's major theme: How important are the small moments? If it takes this much out of us just to get through the daily business of being alive, how do you find the strength to keep going? What makes this work is how, for all the aliens and forays into mad science, this is a fundamentally simple tale. It's a bit like one of those point-and-click adventure games: Jake sees something he wants, and then has to go through a series of seemingly random tasks in order to get it. But those tasks, in part because they're motivated by a sincere desire to make someone's life better, ripple outward.

So there's a Willie Mays rookie card at an auction at Quark's. Jake browbeats Nog into giving him the money to buy it—it's a nice touch that Jake doesn't really take his friend's reluctance seriously, since it's easy to be selfish when you're trying to do something nice; besides, Jake grew up without a concept of money, so it's likely he considers the subject a bit less weighty than a Ferengi would. Not that it matters in the end; Jake and Nog lose the auction when a mysterious human bids exorbitantly against them. So Jake and Nog go to see the human, a scientist named Dr. Giger (Brian Markinson), to see if they can purchase the baseball card directly from him. (The card was part of a larger lot of antiques.) Dr. Giger rejects them initially, then changes his mind, and gives them a list of items he'll

take in exchange for the Willie Mays. Which is great, except there's a pretty good chance Dr. Giger is completely mental.

Trek shows are often filled with wonderful, bordering on magical technology; it's a tool to make certain kinds of stories possible, and it also adds to the escapist vibe all these shows share, the suggestion of a remarkable place you'll be more than happy to spend hours visiting. But just because the future is apparently full of all kinds of wonderful toys (warp drive, replicators, the mindfuck that is the holodeck) doesn't mean that everyone's going to have everything they want. There are still going to be people pushing the boundaries of accepted knowledge, and some of those people are going to be crackpots, even if they're right. Dr. Giger's "cell entertainment is the key to immortality" theory is loopy. It's possible it's true (the episode never confirms this one way or the other, although I'm leaning towards "no"), but the idea is so fringe-level goofy it's hard to take seriously. And Giger himself doesn't help, as he rails to Jake and Nog about the dangers of the "soulless minions of orthodoxy" (band name!) he believes are working to destroy him. The guy's a nut, and it's refreshing to see this kind of batshit science on a show that reveres the pursuit of knowledge when it isn't preaching the heaven of agrarian, rural utopias.

By the end of the hour, Jake gets his baseball card, although it takes some doing to get there, including a completely ill-advised attempt to strong arm Kai Winn (for a kid who works as a reporter, he's weirdly naive), and a confrontation with Weyoun that almost, but not quite, turns into a total disaster. Winn and Weyoun are on the station to discuss a possible non-aggression pact between Bajor and the Dominion, a possibility which raises still more potential problems for Sisko, but in the episode's closing moments, he's smiling. Partly because Jake gives him the card, and partly because so many members of his staff seem a little happier, due in large part of Jake and Nog's willingness to do favors. Too often, good intentions lead to bad news, but just this once, a sincere desire to make someone else's life better managed to have a larger, more positive effect than intended. The key, I think, is recognizing that even when you can't fix everything, the desire to help the people you love is a noble one. And hell, maybe Dr. Giger is on to something after all. You can't stave off death forever—but if you can keep yourself entertained, you'll better enjoy the time you get.

Stray observations:

- The Mays card Jake works so hard for is, I think, [a 1951 Bowman](#); do some poking around, and you'll see that the picture used in the episode matches up with the picture on the actual card. Which is very cool. I wonder how the future treats collectibles—is there some sort of barter system in the Federation for getting a hold of obscure stuff? Because part of the value of a collectible is its history; a replicated version wouldn't have the same appeal.
- Best mini-quest: Nog has to steal Bashir's teddy bear back from Leeta. (Seems odd she would've kept it. Also, why the hell does Nog take it while Leeta is sleeping with the bear in her arms?)

- Louise Fletcher does terrific work as Kai Winn, but I won't lie, I shudder every time she appears in an episode, and it's not a fun shudder.
- So, so glad Jake's time-travel cover story fell flat. I think if Weyoun had believed him, it would've killed the episode.
- I continue to love Weyoun's relentless smarminess. He keeps trying to put the friend moves on Sisko, no matter how many times Sisko puts him off ("You see, I really like Deep Space Nine, and I like you."), and he even tries to work his way into the Kai's good graces, with equally unsatisfying results. But while I wouldn't go so far to say he's a likeable guy, "In The Cards" shows him in a slightly different light; his decision to give Jake the baseball card is clearly political, but it's still a nice move, and his open-minded interest in Giger's project suggests a kind of curiosity that makes him more than just a stooge of the evil empire.
- Michael Dorn directed! Did a fine job, too.

"Call To Arms" (season five, episode 26; originally aired 6/16/1997)

In which the Dominion War begins...

Well, the big day has finally arrived. After a few episodes of hemming, hawing, and sitcom-like plotlines, Leeta and Rom are getting ready to tie the knot once and for all. The small arguments remain; in traditional Ferengi weddings, women don't wear anything, and Leeta isn't really keen on Rom's subtle attempts to encourage her to pick a more revealing dress. Garak's fed up about their indecisiveness, the way only Garak can be fed up, but Ziyal offers encouragement, and presumably they settle on something everyone can live with, because Rom asks Sisko to perform the ceremony. It's all charming enough, in a light, can-we-get-on-with-this kind of way, only the charm changes once the rest of the story kicks in. All of a sudden, goofy relationships don't seem so goofy anymore. When Rom and Leeta finally wed, there's a somberness to the proceedings. Because war isn't coming anymore. It's here. And everything's changing.

By now, *DS9*'s attempts to tell a long, serialized story over the course of its run have become integrated enough into the show that they no longer seem exactly novel. You know going into a season that there will be some standalone hours, and some plot-moving hours, and that the main thread—the encroaching threat of the Dominion—will come that much closer to our heroes' doorstep. It's a compromised, imperfect approach to narrative that always leaves us feeling imperfectly satisfied, hungry for the next tidbits, positive we're missing some important development this week just because the camera decided to follow Worf and Dax on holiday. But then, intentional or not, that's not a bad take on how life tends to unfold. The picture is never as complete as we'd like it to be. Sometimes important events happen too fast, sometimes they take years to unfold, and when they actually do arrive, they're pale shadows of our expectations, over too quickly without leaving a mark.

“Call To Arms” serves as a payoff to the season-long buildup to the Dominion War, and it does not disappoint, giving us some rousing action, some moving emotional beats, and concluding with a dramatic, and, from my perspective at least, completely unexpected shift in the series’ status quo. It’s the sort of sudden shock that made me fall in love with [Battlestar Galactica](#): forcing characters into different roles, different context, and tearing apart the show at its very foundations, until we’re forced to question what brings us here in the first place. Is this a show about a group of people working together on a space station? Or is there something more underneath that? The last scene has the cast spread out across the universe, gearing up for war, facing down their oppressors, and more than a little lost. It’s a bold move whose boldness only becomes clear in retrospect. In the moment, everything that happens makes sense.

That’s why it’s so brilliant. This isn’t a cheat. I can’t imagine what it was like in the writers room, and I don’t know how far in advance this change was planned, but there must’ve been some temptation to play things safe. That’s what TV shows do, right? Especially shows going into their sixth year. Surely someone must’ve have floated an idea that would’ve left Sisko still in charge of DS9, would’ve kept Dukat and Weyoun away, would’ve managed to stall out, or compromise a solution to, the Dominion/Cardassian threat. But that’s not the direction the story was heading, and to have cheated out of the more organic conclusion would’ve been to rob the show of its potential greatness. (Potential future greatness, I mean. It’s already pretty great as is.) I don’t know where this is going. If season six has everybody back on the station by the third episode, I don’t know how that will play, or if it will undercut the power of this episode’s final scenes. But man, if the show pulled this off, it’s impressive as hell.

But before we get there, it’s worth showing how smartly the script sets the stage for its climax. Things are getting worse. The Dominion has been sending fleets of Jem’Hadar ships through the wormhole, and while those fleets all head immediately to Cardassian territory, the message is clear: The enemy is marshaling its forces. This puts Sisko in a tight spot. Peace is great, but this isn’t going to last forever. Sooner or later, the Dominion is going to decide it’s built up a strong enough presence in the Alpha Quadrant, and then they’re going to strike. If Sisko waits until this happens, he’ll almost certainly lose the war before it even really gets going. Allowing your enemy to choose both the time and the place for the assault is bad enough, but the Federation isn’t sending out any corresponding reinforcements to protect DS9. The captain is on his own, and the longer he lets the Founders call the shots, the more powerful the hit will be when they finally pull the trigger.

So he makes a tactical move and mines the wormhole. It’s the perfect sort of passive aggression, drawing a line in the sand that forces the other side to take the first step. At the same time, he gets in touch with Bajor, and he tells them to sign the non-aggression pact first mentioned in the previous episode. While we can quibble over whether or not the stalling was necessary, this is still a brilliant choice, and its brilliant in a way I’ve come to think defines the series at its best. Because it’s fucking complicated. While the war does have a “good” side and a “bad” side, there are layers to this shit. Although he still has hopes he might be able to force the Dominion back, Sisko’s role as the Emissary means it’s his responsibility to make sure Bajor doesn’t have to suffer another occupation before all of

this is resolved. This isn't just a fight. It's a conflict that involves political maneuvering and long-term planning as much as it does quick reflexes and tactical genius.

While all this is going on, "Call To Arms" also takes the time to remind us why we've connected with these characters, checking in with everyone, if only briefly, to show us why their fate—and their place on the station—matters. Odo addresses the tension between him and Kira, promising her he has no intention of asking her to dinner until the war is over. It's a promise that's made to protect him as much as her, and I wonder how long he'll be able to keep it. As the mines draw the attention of Dukat and Weyoun, everyone else is getting ready for battle, working on station equipment, preparing Sick Bay for an influx of casualties, making nervy jokes about the future. Rom and Leeta finally take the plunge, but everything's too far gone for it to be a joke anymore; and while it's still hard to care too much about their nuptial vows, the symbolism is hard to ignore. Hold your loved ones close, and be ready to make a stand, because time has become very short indeed. Everyone starts saying goodbyes. Soon after they're married, Rom basically orders Leeta to Bajor for her own protection, and others are following suit. Ziyal and Garak say goodbye, and to comfort his friend, the tailor tells her his story; it's something we've heard before, but this framing is a reminder of how much of a survivor Garak truly is. How unstoppable he can be when he puts his mind to it. There's a resilience to all these characters that makes the final scenes triumphant, even as they represent a retreat. DS9 is a place for outsiders, but outsiders endure. And when they pull together, they create a force to be reckoned with.

So yes, it's painful to see the cast split and thrown to the four winds. Sisko's plan is as desperate as it is gutsy. Staying on the station just long enough to make sure the mine field is made operational, he abandons his post in the *Defiant* with Dax, O'Brien, Garak, and Bashir, heading to rendezvous with a massive Federation fleet in a different quadrant. Kira, Odo, and Quark stay behind on DS9, to work for the station's new owners and, presumably, undermine their authority; Jake, foolishly, bravely, moronically stays with them, because he wants to be a reporter, and this is where the action is. Worf is on General Martok's ship, after learning that Dax has finally decided she's willing to marry him. Nothing is what it used to be, and when we begin the sixth season this fall, we'll find the show in a place its never been before, on the run and ready for action.

But like I said, this is triumphant. You throw people like Sisko and Kira and Odo and the rest up against the wall, and they have this way of smiling that means everything can change. Sisko made sure Dukat wouldn't have an easy time of things, wrecking the station's computer network before he made his exit. And he left his baseball on his desk for Dukat to find. As Dukat notes, it's a message. This isn't over yet.

Stray observations:

- This week's pair of episodes work really, really well together; they almost feel like an informal two-parter, with the former's light tone gradually leading into the latter's intensity.
- "We're losing the peace, which means a war could be our only hope."—Sisko, in a weirdly Nixonian kind of way.

- Quark, ever the pragmatist, makes sure to get in a huge supply of yamok sauce, a Cardassian delicacy. His approach to a crisis is refreshing in its directness. (That said, the scene between him and Rom is legitimately sweet. Quark even kisses the back of his head, which is not something I can remember him ever doing before.)
- The space battle, as the station and Martok work to hold back the Jem'Hadar fleet long enough for Dax and O'Brien to set up the minefield, is a smart way to both give the audience something visceral and allow a thwarted climax. After all, this isn't a definitive conclusion; the war is just starting. But as cool and thrilling as that is as a writing choice, it's nice of the writers to throw in some explosions to tide us over until the next season starts.
- "You'd shoot a man in the back." "Well, it's the safest way, isn't it?" —Maybe the most Garak line ever.
- That final shot of the *Defiant* joining the Federation fleet is a "Fuck yeah!" moment if I ever saw one.
- "And I promise I will not rest until I stand with you again, here in this place where I belong." —Sisko. Excuse me, I have a little something in my eye.

Next week: We say goodbye to Deep Space Nine until the fall. Please join me next Thursday as I dive into the second season of [*Monty Python's Flying Circus*](#).

SEASON SIX

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “A Time to Stand”/“Rocks And Shoals”[Zack Handlen](#)[9/12/13 10:00AM](#)**“A Time To Stand” (season 6, episode 1; originally aired 9/29/1997)***In which we return to a bad situation...*

The war isn't going well.

Admittedly, this depends on where you stand. If you're with Cardassia and the Dominion, like Gul Dukat and Weyoun back on Deep Space Nine, things are pretty much okay. Dukat is lording it over his former enemies, going into full creep mode with Kira, while Weyoun uses smiles to cover steel. They have their concerns: Kira keeps pushing for a Bajoran security force on the station, and Dukat doesn't bother to talk with Weyoun before saying no; and the minefield Sisko and the others left around the wormhole is still very much in effect, prompting some fundamental concerns about the Vorta's access to Ketracel White. But overall, the battle is going according to plan. This, presumably, is how the Dominion has always handled conquest. Velvet glove for any race willing to capitulate to their oh-so-minor demands, and iron fist for anyone foolish enough to deny them. Their tactics depend as much on manipulation as they do on combat prowess, which is what makes them so dangerous. The Federation has dealt with brute force, first in the form of the Klingons, and then the Borg. But an enemy who's willing to engage on multiple levels is, as far as I can remember, pretty much a first, at least on this scale.

So no, the war isn't going well for our heroes. This puts to rest any lingering concerns that the show would take the status quo shattering finale (Sisko, Dax, Worf, Bashir, O'Brien, Nog, and Garak are off

the station; Kira, Odo, Quark, and Jake stayed behind, the first three because that's where their jobs are, the last because he's an idiot) and put things back to normal too quickly. The first two episodes of the sixth season are taking the Dominion War very seriously, which gives the rest of the season something to play off. We know the stakes very clearly, and, just as importantly, we know this isn't a villain that can be quickly and simply defeated. I have no idea how the show ultimately chooses to handle the Dominion threat, and if they take an easy way out ("I found a magic box that kills Vorta and makes the Jem'Hadar love kittens! Okay, they get fiercely protective of the kittens and have launched a genocidal war on dogs, but it's a process!"), that will suck, and we'll deal with it then. Right now, though, life is complicated, and complicated is a good place for *Deep Space Nine* to be.

The best example of this complexity comes from Quark's first scene in the season. Kira and Odo are having a conversation at the bar, and Quark tries, in his slightly tone-deaf way, to console them. As occupations go, he points out, the current one isn't so bad: no work camps, no martial law, no summary executions. While he admits he "misses" the Federation (and weirdly, he even sounds sincere), this is hardly the horrorshow it was during Kira's years as a resistance fighter. Odo can't help but agree, and even Kira can't completely deny this is basically the truth. The situation is due to Sisko; in his position as the Emissary, he helped ensure that Bajor would be kept out of the fighting, which created the gray area that everyone on DS9 currently lives in. But while that's great for the people on Bajor, and has surely saved a lot of strife and bloodshed, it means it's harder to find where the lines are. For Kira, this is especially problematic, although it won't become a major issue until the next episode; regardless, while we know who the villains are, some of them (Weyoun) keep resisting clear signifiers. There's something insidious about how helpful he is, how relentlessly, endlessly polite. It's the kind of behavior that makes righteous anger harder to maintain. Unlike, say, Dukat, whose creepy, predatory advances on Kira serve as a useful reminder of just how awful Cardassian control can be.

Things are a bit simpler for Sisko and his team. Apart from some concern about Jake (who, as mentioned, decided to stay behind so he could be a better reporter; it's a choice so dumb I kind of respect it), and Worf's concern that he and Jadzia's wedding be as traditional as possible (because, well, Worf), the focus is on winning the war, and, just in case this slipped by you twice already, it's not going great. Quickly and efficiently, the script (credited to Ira Steven Behr and Hans Beimler) establishes the odds against our heroes. There's a minor exchange that serves as a symbol for the whole sorry situation: In the first few scenes we hear concerns about a mystical "Seventh Fleet" that O'Brien, Dax, and the others have set their hopes on. Given the way narrative tends to work, that gives the phrase a certain weight, a certain special importance, so that when Bashir tells Sisko and Martok that only 14 of the 112 ships of the fleet have returned, it becomes a short, short story that tells us what we need to know. This is a disaster. There is no cavalry.

Thankfully, this is the kind of crisis Sisko and the others thrive in, although rarely on such a galactic scale. While the first part of "A Time To Stand" is about establishing the current situation, the second part is a fun mini-adventure focusing on Team Sisko flying a Jem'Hadar ship (last seen in "The Ship") into Dominion territory to take out a Ketracel White manufacturing plant, making it that much more difficult for the Vorta to maintain control. DS9 can do this sort of episode in its sleep, and everyone

here is in fine form, right down to a sharp suspense sequence that serves as the episode's climax. Garak has become an accepted member of the team, which I'm sure will last right up until it doesn't, and Dax and Worf are still very much in, um, all right I'll call it love. (She does jump into his arms at one point, which is weird and kind of hilarious.) The biggest character change? Bashir has stopped "hiding" his genetic manipulations, so we get a lot of Data/C-3PO-esque calculations of odds and what not. It's a direction I'm not sure I'm entirely on board with, as right now, it doesn't entirely gel with the Bashir we've always know; but it does have a nice pay off when, at the very end, when an explosion destroys the ship's warp drive, the good doctor is able to rattle off just how long it will take them to get back to Federation space on impulse. (Spoiler: It's a very long time.)

As premieres go, there isn't a huge amount of story in this one. While I can see the destruction of the Ketracel White plant having important ramifications (especially given Weyoun's earlier comments to Dukat about just how important it is to dismantle the mine field), all of the action in the latter half takes place on the bridge of the Jem'Hadar ship, which limits its scope; this feels more like a minor step forward than a major shift in fortunes. This is not a criticism. "A Time To Stand" feels like the show running head on into serialization and embracing it fully, choosing to trust the audience will be satisfied with small steps forward and the promise of things to come. There's no closure here and even the cliffhanger is specifically focused on our heroes, and not on the larger crisis; there's no sense that the next episode will see the end of the war and Sisko's return to the station. Instead, we're left to appreciate the texture of the world. Like the Jem'Hadar soldiers (actually, that is a redundant phrase) hanging out at Quark's bar, ignoring his attempts at small talk. Or Kira's belief that Dukat is looking to get revenge for getting beaten the last time Cardassia occupied Bajor. Or Sisko's attempts to explain to his father why Jake got left behind. Or Jake's doomed attempts to get Weyoun to transmit his reporting off the station. Or, and this might be especially important, the fact that the Jem'Hadar ship has no chairs; no food replicators; no med-bay; and no viewscreen. (There's a device that the Vorta wear that simulates a viewscreen—Sisko tries it, but it gives him an awful headache and Garak takes over.) Or the fact that Sisko is forced to fire on the ship of an old friend. Between this episode and next, we're given plenty of chances to consider who the Jem'Hadar really are, and what drives them. The genetically engineered race is the source of so much of the Dominion's power; but they're also a weakness. They're victims who have made a religion out of the suffering, and if Sisko can find some way to get past that, it might be the end of all his troubles. Or not. Things aren't as easy as they used to be.

Stray observations:

- I'm hoping Bashir loses the stats talk soon; Data gets a pass for that sort of thing because he doesn't know any better, but after years of (successfully) pretending to be absolutely normal, you'd think Bashir would've realized how irritating it is. (Or maybe this is how he deals with stress now.)
- Sisko's "Well... no," when he's talking to his dad about Jake is a great line reading.

- Dukat's behavior around Kira is deeply, deeply unpleasant. It's an honest, if not fully explored, glimpse of how sexual aggressiveness can be just another way of establishing domination, and I hope it pays off with her shoving him out an airlock.
- On Kira's request, Odo uses his influence over Weyoun to win some concessions and ends up a member of the station's Ruling Council. Which could be interesting.

“Rocks And Shoals” (season 6, episode 2; originally aired 10/6/1997)

In which Sisko and Kira learn the limits of reason...

The end of season five left a lot of questions unanswered, and one of the big ones was how the show would function with a third of its main ensemble split off from the rest of the group. It's not the most exciting of mysteries, but it's something that needed a quick and decisive answer if the show was going to work as well as it had in the past; this is the *Trek* series with the strongest ensemble, the one which has no real leading man standing head and shoulder above the rest. Sisko is a fine captain, and unquestionably the closest *DS9* comes to a specific protagonist, but the writers have always managed to spread the wealth around in the past. And one of the ways they've accomplished this is by mixing and matching the cast at every opportunity. By limiting the options of who could be talking to whom, there was always a chance that season six would be handicapping itself right out of the gate. Worse, with all that space between the two groups, any attempt to focus on both could come across as too calculated, and too fundamentally disparate, to work.

“Rocks And Shoals” puts this concern to rest. While the premiere managed to mix in scenes from both settings, events back on DS9 were less of a concrete story than they were a series of moments designed to catch us back up with everyone. (Kira's desire to get the Bajoran security force reinstated is the closest thing she and Odo have to a plot, but it's pretty sub.) Here, though, we get two concurrent throughlines, and while Sisko and his team's face-off against a crashed squad of Jem'Hadar and their injured Vorta leader is the more immediately thrilling, Kira's struggles with her new role on DS9 is just as impactful, delving more deeply into all that ambiguity the previous episode established so well. Sisko, O'Brien, and the others are fighting for their lives, but they know they're fighting on the side of what's right. Their motives, and their hands, are clean. Poor Kira, though, is once again forced to take a reckoning of the woman she's become, and bear with just how far she is from her revolutionary past. Yet there is something that connects the two groups. It's something about how belief is what sustains us, and that there are times when the worst thing in the world isn't a threat on your life, or the possibility of violence, but simply not knowing who you are.

For the planet-bound, this theme manifests itself in yet another complicated confrontation with the Jem'Hadar. The plot is fine, allowing Garak ample opportunities to do his Garak thing (lie convincingly, and then, when his lies are undone by an obvious truth, take the reveal in stride), and reminding us once again that the Vorta are manipulative, self-serving creeps, but there's also something a little familiar about it at this point; this isn't the first time we've seen our heroes face off against a

Jem'Hadar squad on rocky terrain, with a manipulative Vorta trying to force the outcome. And while this is nit-picky, the coincidence of Sisko's ship crash-landing on the same part of the same planet where another ship had already crash-landed is a bit of a stretch, especially considering the two crashes have absolutely nothing to do with one another. It's understandable the writers would have trouble coming up with new ways for our heroes to have to deal face to face with the enemy, but hopefully the "let's all hang out at that one outdoor location we always use for new planets and snipe at each other" hook isn't one that's going to dominate the season.

Still, there are enough variations to keep the episode from being a rehash. First and foremost is that Ron Moore's script largely eschews the traditional sources of suspense. Yes, there are Jem'Hadar, and yes, they theoretically pose a threat, but the menace is never really the focus; this isn't a thriller so much as a character study, even if it does have some thriller elements. Early in the hour, Nog and Garak get captured by the Jem'Hadar, and there's a tense conversation in which Garak tries to pretend he's working for the Dominion, and Keevan (Christopher Shea), the Vorta, sees through his lies. But Keevan is seriously ill, and it soon becomes apparent that his plan isn't to attack Sisko and the others, but rather use them to save himself from the Jem'Hadar, who are certain to go insane when the meager supply of Ketracel White finally runs out. Once this comes out, the focus of the conflict shifts from physical to moral terms. How complicit is Sisko willing to be to save the lives of his crew? How far is he obligated to go to do honor to a species that was, in a sense, bred and raised to destroy him, along with all other enemies of the Founders?

The few conversations we get between Sisko and Third Remata'Klan (Phil Morris), the current leader of the Jem'Hadar squad, are among the episode's best scenes. Apart from Kira's arc, Remata'Klan's story leaves the largest impression, in part because we never get the complete details of his backstory. Apparently he failed in some way—questioned the Vorta's orders—and now he is locked into the role of taking responsibility of his men without having the authority or honor of being the First. Relations with Keevan are on shaky ground from the start, and this is a weak spot Sisko does his best to exploit; in part because it's a good tactic to sow discord among your enemies, and in part because the captain clearly respects the Jem'Hadar and thinks that respect brings understanding. When Keevan tells Sisko and Bashir of his plan to betray his own men, Sisko is disgusted, even though the Vorta's scheme is maybe the best chance any of them have for survival. And really, any decent person would be—leading your men into slaughter to save your own skin is a despicable act. To Keevan, the Jem'Hadar are a tool. As soon as the tool proves dangerous, it must be discarded. To Sisko, the Jem'Hadar are conscious beings, who deserve the same fundamental rights of all conscious beings; more, he thinks that belief means he can convince Remata'Klan to disobey orders. He's wrong. The two are able to talk with each other as relative equals, and even share some basic camaraderie. But the Jem'Hadar still walk into the trap, even when they know full well it means their death. This is how they define themselves. Their lives matter less than the terms on which they live them. Maybe Sisko already understands this; but he'll need to accept it if he wants his side to have any chance of winning.

That leaves us with Kira back on the station. Moore makes a point of showing us her routine: she gets up at 5 a.m., she boards a lift full of Cardassians, she works alongside Cardassians, she meets with

Odo. When Jake lets slip that some of the Vedeks are planning a protest against the Occupation (which now includes a group of Vorta going down to Bajora—unarmed, of course), Kira and Odo decide they have to stop it, lest Dukat use the incident as an excuse to clamp down on security. So Kira talks to the Vedek, and the Vedek agrees to change her plans, although she's not happy about it; and when it comes time for the protest, the Vedek hangs herself.

It's a tough moment, but a necessary one. Kira has struggled with her role in a post-Cardassian Bajor since the first season, and now that Dukat and the others have returned, her position isn't immediately clear. Because it's so easy to rationalize making adjustments. The occupation isn't so bad. People haven't been killed. Maybe if you move the goal posts, maybe if you accept a little more tyranny, a few less freedoms, everything will be okay. Maybe if you smile, and if you're patient, and you do what you're told—maybe if you wait long enough, someone will come and rescue you. You can't justify the risk of rebellion, because you've got these rules you follow now, and things are complicated, okay? It's not as simple as it used to be.

Then a priest hangs herself, and you realize that maybe it really was that simple; maybe you just lost sight of who you need to be. I'm not sure if Kira's plans to oppose Dukat and Weyoun will bear fruit, or if she's just digging herself into a deeper hole; Odo supports her, but Odo would walk with her into the heart of a star if she asked him. But I'm not sure it matters if she's "right." Kira has more free will than the Jem'Hadar, but she'd agree with them on one fundamental point: You decide who you are, and you hold onto that as hard as you can. If you let go, if you weaken in the face of temptation, you're lost. Remata'klan gave his life for his honor, because without it, he had nothing. Here's hoping the price Kira pays won't be as high.

Stray observations:

- O'Brien hasn't had a lot to do so far, but his irritation at discovering he'd torn his pants during the crash-landing is great.
- "It's not my life to give up, Captain. It never was." -Remata'klan. What's fascinating about the Jem'Hadar is how they've found a way to turn their bondage into a kind of strength. They consider themselves superior to the Vorta because of the purity of their dedication.
- There were a couple of cadets on the Jem'Hadar ship with Sisko and the others. The guy dies in the fight with the Jem'Hadar. I don't think he gets a name.
- Dax is injured for the majority of the episode, but she's fine.

Next week: We check in on some "Sons And Daughters" and then take a trip "Behind The Lines."

[Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Sons And Daughters”/“Behind The Lines”](#)[Zack Handlen](#)[9/19/13 10:00AM](#)**"Sons And Daughters" (season 6, episode 3; originally aired 10/13/1997)***In which Alexander returns, and it's not so bad...*

The last time we saw Worf's son Alexander, he was—um... Hold on a sec, (Consults the Internet.) It's the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode ["Firstborn,"](#) which had an Alexander from the future travel to the present in order to force his younger self into following the path of the warrior, because in the future, Worf would be murdered, and Alexander would blame himself. Really? And I reviewed it, even. I guess I sort of remember it. What a silly plot. But then, it's not like the writers of *TNG* ever really got a handle on the character, or even that there was much of a character to get a handle on. Giving ensemble members children is a risky scenario at best, given that parenting is a restrictive lifestyle; you can't have someone throwing themselves into adventure when they have a mouth to feed back home. But it's possible to manage it, and one of *DS9*'s best relationships is the father and son bond between Sisko and Jake. Worf and Alexander were never that lucky. After *TNG* ended, it seemed safe to assume that Alexander was gone for good, shuffled off to grow up with his grandparents. There didn't seem to be any pressing need to bring him back, not even when Worf returned. Yes, in terms of "realism," Worf was pretty fucking horrible for basically ditching his kid and never looking back, but isn't that what we all secretly wanted anyway? Isn't it better to downplay, and eventually write-off, a plotline that isn't working, rather than try and keep it going for continuity's sake?

Generally, I'd say yes, but "Sons And Daughters" does a reasonable, if imperfect, job of showing how someone like Alexander can still be a valuable presence, even if he's not particularly interesting in his own right. While on a fictional, meta level, the character's disappearance was a relief; I'm sure there were a few fans who noted his absence and were disappointed by it, but he was never that vital on *TNG*, and seeming to leave him behind completely on *DS9* didn't leave that many questions unanswered. (As some of you noted, Worf said he has "no family" after his brother gets a new life in ["Sons Of Mogh,"](#) which, if intentional and not just a writerly lapse, is awful cold, even for Worf.) But on a story level, where we pretend these are all real people—which is totally cool—that is some fucked up shit, right? After an awkward year or two together aboard the Enterprise, Worf sends his son off to leave with his adoptive parents, and then never mentions the kid again. In theory, he could've been talking with Alexander regularly, even making trips home, without us knowing about it, but that's not the impression you get from "Sons And Daughters," and that doesn't reflect well on Worf at all.

That's something the episode does its best to deal with, and while it's probably impossible to make a unintentional multi-year absence into a strength, writers Bradley Thompson and David Weddle do their best. The crux of the hour's main plot is that since we last saw him, Alexander and his father have grown even further apart, and he's decided, out of self-loathing and a deeply buried need to prove himself worthy and earn Worf's respect, to enlist in the Klingon army. He shows up on Martok's ship one day as one of the replacements sent to fill in for the general's fallen crew-members, and wastes very little time in proving to everyone that he's not very good at his job. That's the most surprisingly aspect of the episode: despite his determination to prove his father wrong, Alexander keeps making mistakes, and not just the obvious ones. The other crewmembers pick on him (in fine Klingon tradition), and when he gets into a fight with the most obvious bully, only Worf's last minute intervention stops him from getting some knife wounds. (Martok later assures Worf the wounds wouldn't've been fatal, but still.) Even worse, Alexander is a failure on the job, failing to wipe a simulation program out of the system and throwing the entire ship into an unnecessary red alert.

He's a joke, really, which goes over with Worf about as well as you'd expect. Marc Worden's performance is sullen, awkward, and more than a little stiff, which is a good fit for the character; you get a clear sense of his resentment and self-loathing, as well as his undeniable connection to Worf. (Both men seem like they'd be no damn fun at parties.) It's fascinating to watch just how utterly unsuited he is to the role he's chosen, and between this episode and the his final appearance on *TNG*, the franchise seems at once trying to establish how inept Alexander is as a traditional Klingon, while still forcing him to take up that mantle. The arc of his plot in "Sons And Daughters" is, in a general way, a positive one. He's a putz, and he shames himself repeatedly, but Worf finally remembers his duty as a father; and we all know how much Worf loves duty. The episode ends with Alexander being brought into Martok's family, and Worf's promise that he'll give Alexander the instruction he needs to become a true warrior.

This is presented as a happy conclusion, and in many ways, it is. The two have found a way to repair the bonds between them, and hopefully, with Worf's help, Alexander won't be locking himself into anymore vents. Yet the assumption than any Klingon can be a good-to-great warrior, and that being a

warrior is the only value a Klingon should aspire to, is disappointingly simplistic, especially for a show that thrives on outcasts. Yes, there's that whole plot from TNG about Worf getting murdered and Alexander needing to be a warrior to stop it, but that's one of those crazy, final season style twists that's best left forgotten. One of the few ways Alexander was legitimately interesting was his rejection of many of the values Worf held dear. This came partly from his mother (and Worf's brusque summary of their relationship to Martok is pretty harsh), and partly from his time on the Enterprise, and it also forced Worf into yet another painful crisis; with all his conviction and beliefs about the Klingon ideal, the child he'd tried to raise was choosing a different path. Here, whatever personality Alexander might once have had is gone, subsumed in paternal resentment, and when that resentment is gone, there's nothing much left. It's good to see him happy at the end, because the ending does feel earned (Worf's warm response after Alexander locks himself behind an emergency door is the most I've liked Worf in ages), but it comes at the sacrifice of character. Not a well-drawn character, or a particularly likable one, but still.

Events back on the station are more unambiguously satisfying, even if they do require enduring more of Dukat's deeply creepy sexual advances on Kira. The Gul brings his daughter, Ziyal, back to the station, and Kira's happy to see her—until Ziyal invites Kira over to dinner with her and her father. The crux of the subplot is that Ziyal wants everyone along, and that includes forcing Dukat (who's into it) and Kira (who isn't) to spend time together. It's a fine, noble motivation put to an ignoble cause. Because she's young, and because she loves her father, Ziyal doesn't understand both the nature of Dukats disturbing attachment the major, and Kira's fundamental distrust and contempt for Dukat. To her, because she cares for them both, they should both care for each other. (And given that Ziyal's mother was Bajoran, she might not even be that bothered at the idea of a Dukat/Kira pairing oh it is just gross even to type that.) But regardless of the nobility of her intentions, she's in the wrong, and it takes Kira, who clearly cares a great deal about Ziyal, to finally draw the line.

Once again, the writers are exploring the potential seductiveness of evil. As with the first two episodes of the season, which had Kira struggling to raise an objection to an invasion cloaked by courtesy, she's once again put in a position where she has to make noise, where she has to be the "rude" one to protect herself and her sanity. Dukat is, like most great villains, a complicated creature. There's no question that his love of his daughter is sincere; the fact that he and Kira share this fondness makes it that much harder for her to be openly defiant. Evil that is openly combative, that carries a gun (or a phaser) and tries to push its needs on you with brute force, inspires a simple response: fight or flight. But smiles and warm chuckles and pleasantries put you in a position of doubt. It's a position many women have been in before, I think—go along with it, and make things easier for everyone. Don't be the one who ruins it all. Don't shout, don't curse, don't make a scene. Don't struggle. Just accept that he knows what's best, and everything will be fine.

It's horrifying, and it's impressive that the franchise, which has often had difficulties accurately representing such dynamics in the past, handles this one with such direct honesty. Dukat sends Kira a dress, which is an intimate gift, as well as an attempt to exert a level control over her body, and she realizes she's gone as far as she's willing to go. Ziyal confronts her in a hallway, and Kira is open about

the situation; and when Ziyal begs Kira not to ask her to choose between Dukat and the major, Kira says, “I’m not. He’s your father.” While it’s sad that this will most likely hinder, or even end, their friendship, it’s the only response she could’ve given. Trying to convince Ziyal that Dukat was a monster, or trying to justify her decision based on their past, would’ve done no good, and it also would’ve put her back in the position of having to defend her right to define her feelings. Sometimes nuance is important. And sometimes, it’s just a way to let someone else tell you what they want to hear.

Stray observations:

- The episode starts with Worf and Dax making out, and it looks like Michael Dorn is trying to devour Terry Farrell’s soul.
- “I tell you, Worf, war is much more fun when you’re winning!” -General Martok
- When Kira rejects the dress Dukat sends her, Dukat regifts it to his daughter. That is some uncomfortable subtext right there. (In that Dukat seems to view the women in his life as possessions, regardless of the specific nature of their relationship.)

“Behind The Lines” (season 6, episode 4; originally aired 10/20/1997)

In which Odo crosses one...

Why does Odo stay on Deep Space Nine? I suppose the question is moot for the moment; with the wormhole mined, there’s no place left for him to go. But assume the mines aren’t there. They weren’t there for most of last season, and they won’t be there again soon, I’m guessing. What keeps him from rejoining his people in the Great Link? He loves Kira. That’s not a bad place to start; he loves Kira, and even if she doesn’t return his feelings, that doesn’t change how much she, and their friendship, means to them. But it would have to be more than that, wouldn’t it? This isn’t just not wanting to move back home to stay close to someone you care about. This is literally rejecting his biological nature. This is refusing to be what his DNA demands. Love is a remarkable, powerful emotion, and unrequited love can drive people to acts of great sacrifice (or selfishness), but there’s something fundamental going on here that that means more than just romance. Odo isn’t simply in love with Kira; he’s in love with the idea of an Odo who is in love with Kira, with the idea of an Odo who works as a sheriff and detective and keeps the peace. That is a role that makes sense. It’s a role where he knows where he stops and everything else begins, and it’s taken him years to establish. But it’s a lonely place to be.

“Behind The Lines” starts out like it’s going to be about one thing, but shifts focus as it goes, building to one of the more unsettling conclusions in the show’s run so far. The cold open shows Kira and Rom (Rom!) teaming up to start a bar right between the Cardassians and the Jem’Hadar at Quark’s; we then jump to Sisko learning about a sensor array in the Argolis Cluster that the Dominion is using to track the movements of Federation ships. If I’d had to guess at this point, I would’ve said the main plot would be Sisko aboard the *Defiant*, on a mission to blow up the array, while Kira and the others continue to foment dissent back on the station. Both of these stories had potential. Instead, Sisko gets

promoted out of field duty, and the Female Changeling arrives on Deep Space Nine. Goodbye predictions.

Still, Sisko's storyline remains straightforward, albeit in a different direction than I'd assumed. There isn't a huge amount of dramatic weight to it. First we see Sisko performing a ritual with the rest of his crew involving empty power cells and shouting—it's very cool and fundamentally dorky at the same time, and seems perfectly in keeping with the naval atmosphere. The main reason we see it, though, is so Sisko's arc can conclude with Dax leading the same ritual now that Sisko's off the ship. She and the crew went on the mission to destroy the array; it was dangerous work, but they accomplished their task and came back alive. And Sisko spent the whole time back in a room, reading reports and staring out a window at the stars. He's so good at his job that he's no longer doing it; now he gets the less immediately life-threatening but far more important job of making decisions and helping to guide the course of the war. Time moves on. Whenever you think you belong somewhere, it won't last.

Odo's is more complicated, in part because it's not just his story; he and Kira share the focus, and they have very different views on unfolding events. To Kira, the Female Changeling is not to be trusted. She's used Odo in the past, and betrayed him (even if that betrayal was in the service of upholding Changeling law), and the only reason she could have to return to DS9 is to manipulate Odo in the middle of a war. This is an understandable position. The resistance movement on the station is newly formed, with only a handful of members; Jake talks his way in, and Quark breaks down and joins halfway through the hour, but that's still only five people against, well, a lot more than five. This is not a good time to succumb to distraction, especially considering the position Odo has on the station. He's a member of the ruling council and a security chief, and he's now spending time with one of the enemy's high command.

Odo's motivations are more complex. He's committed to Kira, but at the same time, he's as lonely as ever, and there's a subtle need for approval that drives him to reconnect with the Female Changeling. He's brusque initially, and reminds her of what happened the last time he joined the Great Link, but she shrugs it off, and it's not soon after that he invites her to his apartment. When Kira reacts with shock—and when she's even more horrified to learn that Odo linked with the other Changeling—he doesn't really understand what's bothering her. And then, despite promising that he wouldn't link again, he does, and misses an appointment; and by missing that appointment, he allows Rom to get caught by the Cardassians, and arrested on charges of sabotage. Oh, and since Rom's mission was to shut down the deflector array and stop Damar's plan to take out the minefield, well, the good guys look pretty well screwed.

What's fascinating about Odo's decision to link is that there's very little obvious motivation for it. He doesn't see Kira making out with some guy (which wouldn't make his actions justifiable, but would at least give us a clear sense of what's going through his mind), and the Female Changeling doesn't deliver a big speech or put much pressure on him to break his promise. She just laughs and says that Kira is a solid, and doesn't understand what the link is, and how important it is. So, no dramatic transition, really. But in retrospect, it's not hard to imagine Odo's position. Because he's been lonely

and rigid for a very long time; he was a solid, and the loss of one's fundamental biological self would throw a wrench into anybody's priorities. Home is a powerful, primal need, and to belong somewhere is a desire not easy to resist, even if giving in means hurting people you care about.

There's something else, too, something that might just be my imagination. After Rom is arrested, Kira rushes into Odo's apartment and confronts him. And he's... fine. He's not worried or upset or guilty, not even when she finds out he broke his promise and linked with the Female Changeling again. Nothing seems to affect him. Initially, Kira's insistence that Odo refuse the link seemed a little odd; not jealous, exactly (there may be a little of that in there, the same way anyone would be jealous of losing a close friend to another relationship, but Kira's a decent person; she wouldn't let jealousy get in the way of someone's happiness), but overly paranoid. After all, Odo had assured her that the link wouldn't reveal the secret of the resistance. But maybe Kira had a point. The link seems glorious and amazing and calming and wonderful, but it also works as a kind of drug. It placates. And while the Female Changeling acts as though she and Odo are equals, she's the one with more experience in the process; she's the one guiding it. You push past all that take of communion and one-ness and peace and tranquility, the Founders start to sound less like an enlightened race, and more like a cult. And cults don't let anyone go.

Stray observations:

- Quark's drunken speech about how he wants the Federation back is great. It's also surprisingly earned; even with all his root beer cynicism, and even with all the Federation's blandness, it's still better than a station full of grim jerks.
- Good to have Rom back. Man, he gets arrested a lot.
- "It has nothing to do with me." -Odo.

Next week: We'll "Favor The Bold" and get heavy with a "Sacrifice Of Angels."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Favor the Bold”/“Sacrifice Of Angels”[Zack Handlen](#)[9/26/13 10:00AM](#)**“Favor The Bold” (season 6, episode 5; originally aired 10/27/1997)****“Sacrifice Of Angels”(season 6, episode 6; originally aired 11/3/1997)***In which Sisko wants to come home...*

Roughly two-thirds of the way through “Sacrifice Of Angels,” there’s a perfect moment of utter despair. Throughout both episodes of this week’s two-parter, the stakes have been very stark, and very clear. The war is going badly for the Federation, and the good guys need a win, so Sisko comes up with a plan to retake Deep Space 9. It’s a bold strategy, and one which involves a considerable amount of risk; not just for the forces engaged in the battle itself, but for territories outside the fight who will be left unprotected. Like, say, Earth. But Sisko’s plan makes sense, because his former home is of vital importance if the Federation wants any hope of winning the Dominion War. The wormhole is the key, and if Dukat and his men are able to disable Rom’s self-replicating mine-field, the Gamma Quadrant can start sending in reinforcements, and an already lopsided conflict will turn into a rout. But if Sisko’s plan works, and they can take back the station, the Federation can protect the mines, and get a much needed boost in position and morale.

The fight for DS9 is the main focus of the two-parter, with “Favor The Bold” setting the stage for the conflict, and “Sacrifice Of Angels” delivering the goods. And the goods are damn impressive; I’m not the best of judge of these things, but I’d say the space battle that takes up much of “Sacrifice Of Angels” is one of the biggest, and best, space battles in the history of the franchise. Sure, it’s a lot of

CGI ships swooping around each other in a CGI environment, and it lacks the kineticism and budget of a big screen movie, but it's still thrilling to watch. Partly because it's well designed (for once we actually get a sense of just how big these fights can be), and partly because even in the heat of the battle, the narrative is well-defined. Sisko (with an assist from Garak, as Nog stands in for those of us in the audience who aren't big on tactics) tries to draw out the Cardassians to create a hole for the *Defiant* and other ships to break through, and Dukat, recognizing Sisko's ploy, thinks he can pretend to fall for the "trap," and then turn it back around. It's not the most complicated strategy, but for a forty minute show that has a number of other subplots it needs to get to, this gets the job done. We know what's going on, so it's that much easier to get excited about it.

But I was talking about despair, wasn't I? Well, much of the suspense of the two-parter hinges on Damar's plan to destroy the mine-field. There's a lot of messing about and some near misses and reversals, but Kira and Rom finally make it to the central computer, and Rom tries to—well, it's scientific, but he's trying to turn off the system. When he can't manage that quickly enough, Kira tells him to just turn off the station's weapons instead; it's more of a temporary solution, but at least that means that even if Damar successfully manages to prevent the mines from self-replicating, he won't be able to destroy the ones that currently exist. (Really, any sabotage Kira and Rom cook up is going to be a temporary one, given that Damar's plan is fundamentally sound.) Rom turns off the weapons—but it's too late. Dukat has given the order, and the mine-field is destroyed, just as the *Defiant*, the sole ship to make it through the Dominion lines, arrives at the station.

Admittedly, *Deep Space Nine* has never shied away from playing hardball, but the way the episode is structured, and the way everything in the sixth season has been building, Rom's failed attempt to save the mines at the last second is a striking moment of despair. The Federation is losing the war, and has been for a while, but that makes sense, structurally speaking; while a multi-civilization conglomerate with near-infinite resources wouldn't seem to be a great candidate for underdog status, the first part of this season did a reasonable job establishing just how out-classed our heroes are. The Dominion has been conquering other races for a very long time, while the Federation focuses its efforts on peaceful negotiation. That makes them easier to root for (even when they are a bit stiff), but it puts them at a serious disadvantage against an enemy with genetically engineered soldiers and negotiators. (Okay, the soldiers are probably the important part there.) So, there's a Goliath, and a David, and we know which side we're one, and then David comes up with one hell of a slingshot plan. Meanwhile, the, um, other Davids—okay, the metaphor falls apart at this point, but Kira, Rom, Odo, and the others are also engaged in some serious underdogging. By all accounts, Quark's decision to rescue his brother (with Ziyal's help), and Odo finally turning his back on the Female Changeling, should've sealed the deal; the character arcs were finished, and while the conflict came down to the wire, the heroes still saved the day.

Except they didn't. It's a great, shocking moment; not as sad as Ziyal's death, but arguably more dramatically impactful because it's been so carefully and thoroughly built to. The writers patiently walked us into a room and then took away the floor. Even the small touches help; before the mine-field is destroyed, Weyoun and Dukat are talking (and they get some great scenes in both episodes),

and Weyoun decides that the best way to defeat the Federation will be to eradicate the population of Earth. We already heard in the previous episode that Sisko's big play is going to leave Earth vulnerable, and to hear Weyoun casually discussing wiping out the entire population just to prevent the possibility of rebellion, means that when the minefield goes down, we are very aware that our heroes aren't the only ones in the line of fire. Sisko's plan has failed, but there's no sense of blame, especially considering that he and Admiral Ross had received intel (a message from Kira sent through Morn)(Morn!) that the mine field was going down. He'd had no choice, and they'd done their best. Hell, the Klingons even made a last minute appearance, like you knew they would. But it was all for naught. The mines are gone, and the full force of the Dominion is on its way.

What Sisko does next isn't exactly surprising; nor is it a shock when the Federation doesn't ultimately lose the fight. But before we get there, it's worth going back and picking out the threads underline the two-parter, the less exciting bits which nonetheless lend the action sequences the depth they need to succeed. As exciting as Sisko's plan is, and as great as it is to see the whole team (minus Kira and Odo) working together on the *Defiant*, "Favor The Bold" and "Sacrifice Of Angels" get most of their mileage from events on the station. It's neat; it only lasts for a few episodes, if that, but Kira, Odo, Quark, Rom, Weyoun and especially Dukat become the central ensemble, as though the station itself were the show's real main character, and most of our attention is focused on whoever is living inside. Kira's crisis is clear, and her scenes are pretty straightforward. Once she decided to give up on appeasement and return to her revolutionary roots, her emotional conflict was largely resolved. There was anger over Odo's betrayal, but she moves in a straight line, and as thrilling as events are, she's in a good place to deal with them.

The situation with Odo is more unstable, although the two-parter sees it resolved, at least for the moment. Maybe the biggest stunner here is the revelation that Odo and the Female Changeling have actual, physical intercourse, most likely because the Female Changeling was curious, and because she wanted to establish one hold on his soul. The idea of two shapeshifters fucking like us normal solids is weirdly disturbing, like if Silly Putty made porn, but it's the right choice to make, creatively. We know Odo can have sex, because he's had sex before, and that means there's no reason the Female Changeling couldn't have sex. Mimicking the behavior of solids serves to underscore just how different the world the Female Changeling offers is from what Odo has always known. The appeal is obvious—few of us are as outcast from our environments as Odo is, but it's hard to imagine anyone refusing a chance to go someplace where everyone understands and welcomes you; where you can just close your eyes and belong. Sure, Odo can have sex, but it's not the same natural physical need that drives us, and sharing it with the Female Changeling is only a reminder of the artificiality of the act.

It's also a reminder of just how little the Female Changeling understands and cares about the needs of solids. Most of her screen-time is spent with Odo, and with him, she strikes a caring, slightly condescending tone; a teacher trying to impart an important lesson to a wayward, but highly valued, pupil. But her brief scenes with Weyoun and Dukat show someone colder, and more disdainful. She's rarely openly contemptuous, because in her eyes, there's no need to be. The solids are barely worth of notice, let alone disdain. She talks of "breaking" them the way you might break a horse. But she's

capable of intense emotion, which we see when Weyoun dares ask her why she expends so much energy on Odo. To her, and presumably to the rest of her race, bringing Odo back to Great Link is more important than the entirety of the Alpha Quadrant. In addition to clarifying her presence on the station, that reveal also serves as a reminder of just how untouched the Founders are by all of this. Our heroes are fighting for their lives; the Female Changeling is engaged in seduction, and she has all the time in the world.

Which might be why she subtly pushes Odo into betraying her. Maybe the Female Changeling realized that there was no way she could talk Odo out of being in love, and instead decided to let the situation play out, only to pick up the pieces later on when the inevitable (to her mind) occurs. Or it could just be that she doesn't realize the depth of his devotion to Kira. Either way, her decision to have Kira executed (one of the nicer touches here is that after Rom's arrest, no one in the high command has any doubt as to the rest of the conspirators, although it takes them time to move on this knowledge) forces the constable to take action. While it's great to see him rushing to save the day with the rest of the Bajoran security force, the plot resolves a little too quickly for my taste. The triumphant return to the station that marks the end of the episode is also somewhat abrupt (a few more episodes of Sisko trying to get back home might've been nice, although it's not hard to see the stories running out), but it's earned. Odo first succumbing to the dark side and then turning his back on it is disappointingly muted, especially seeing how so much of his decision rests on his love for Kira. There's complexity here if you work at it, but the writers seem comfortable with just settling on easy answers.

We have a better sense of Weyoun now, and he's yet another favorite secondary character to add to the pile. The most unexpected reveal: the Vorta have no sense of aesthetics whatsoever, because the Founders didn't bother to give them any when the race was genetically engineered. Weyoun's wistful, "Though sometimes, I think it would be nice to be able to carry a tune" is really the most sympathetic the character has ever been; as slimy as the Vorta can be, there just as much prisoners of circumstance as the Jem'Hadar. The difference is that their obsequiousness is engrained, and not controlled by drugs, probably because it would be hard to design an effective warrior that didn't have a bit of an edge to him. The Founders don't have allies, just tools, which is something Dukat and the Cardassians might want to remember.

Speaking of Dukat, the Gul is one of the lead figures in the episodes, as we follow his transition from conquering hero (in his eyes) to maddened, grief-stricken fool. Marc Alaimo delivers one of his best performances yet, and it's impressive how subtlety the two-parter lays in arc of his tragedy. In "Favor The Bold," he and Ziyal fight over Rom's captivity and scheduled execution; their father/daughter interactions are one of the more fascinating relationships on a show full of fascinating relationships, because both characters legitimately care about it each other, but their personalities are fundamentally incompatible. I suppose in theory, Ziyal's fundamental decency and compassion could've slowly worked to warp her father's will, but Dukat's worldview bends in all the wrong ways. He doesn't listen to her, or even really respect her; he indulges her. And yet his love is entirely sincere. The Gul is a fantastic villain, because he's so complex that he's not really a villain at all—just a character, who is also a monster. Talking with Weyoun, he tries to convince the Vorta that killing your

enemy isn't the right approach. "A true victory," he says, "is to make your enemy see they were wrong to oppose you in the first place." His entire philosophy is based on an unwavering conviction of his own righteousness. It's not "Might Makes Right." It's *Might Is Right*, but only if he's the one wielding the fist.

And then everything falls apart. That moment of despair I mentioned is Dukat's last moment of pure victory; the final few minutes of believing he'd finally, and utterly, won. Then Sisko disappears into the wormhole and when he comes back, everything goes to shit. The sight of Dukat racing through the station as the Cardassian and Dominion forces evacuate is nifty visual of how fast the tide can change, and his final scene with Ziyal is, if not exactly heartbreaking, intense and unsettling. Dukat demands Ziyal come with him, she refuses and explains that she helped Kira and the others. So now Dukat has nothing, but even that's not far down enough, so Damar shows up and, having heard Ziyal's confession, decides the best course of action is to kill the boss's daughter. It's not a hugely devastating moment; Ziyal was nice and likable, but not exactly essential. But Alaimo's reaction sells it. Even if he didn't have his daughter with him, he still had her love—but now she's dead, and he has nothing. He offers forgiveness, as though that would change anything.

It's good that there's some cost for all of this, because otherwise, the intervention by the Wormhole Aliens would be a little too convenient a resolution. Oh, there's a suggestion that Sisko will have to pay more later on, given that the Prophets basically say (in their particular idiom) that the captain is not going to be "of Bajor" as he so clearly wishes to be. This connects to the scene in the previous episode when Sisko tries to sell Admiral Ross on Bajor's beauty, before talking about how he plans to build a home on the planet someday; clearly, by deciding to help in this conflict, the aliens have made some other decisions as well, which will involve some kind of painful dramatic irony down the line. But there's no follow through for that yet. The *Defiant* enters the wormhole with Sisko having every intention of making it a suicide mission (thus fulfilling the prophecy O'Brien and Bashir made when they started quoting from "The Charge Of The Light Brigade" at the start of the battle; maybe pick something more cheerful next time, guys?); the aliens snag Sisko and argue with him a bit about his plans; he yells at them; they make a decision; and the next thing we know, the Dominion fleet has disappeared.

As climaxes go, it's an odd choice, even if it is something that's practically built into the series' DNA. As soon as Sisko heads the ship towards the wormhole, it's obvious what the resolution was going to be, and surely on some level he must have hoped that the Prophets might contact him. He had been reading all those ancient text after all. But dramatically speaking, it can't help but feel like a cheat, even though it does take a few minutes for the aliens to decide to intervene. The rest of the two parter is strong enough that this isn't a huge issue, and, again, it's not like the aliens hadn't been a presence on the show before. And maybe a big exciting victory wasn't really the point. When Sisko and the others arrive back on the station, there's a lot of cheering and hugging, but that doesn't change the fact that Ziyal is dead in the infirmary, and that Garak will never get to find out why she loved him. The season was structured to build to this moment, to restore order to the show and get everyone back where they belong. The underdog one, and Goliath is dead, or at least temporarily

stunned. But there's always a cost. That moment of despair forced Sisko to make a deal he still doesn't know the consequences of, and as Ziyal could've told him, on this show, there are always consequences.

Stray observations:

- Quark's big hero moment was terrific; first the fake-out with the souffle, then holding the two Jem'Hadar guards at bay with twin phasers. (I was just starting to wonder how long he could really expect to keep the soldiers off him when he shot them both.)
- The next episode looks to be about Worf and Dax's wedding, which, ugh, but if I can make a polite request: I want more O'Brien and Bashir. Both have been shortchanged so far, although it was cute how quickly they got back to their holosuites routine. (Although, I dunno, wouldn't you want to rest for a bit after being in an actual battle?)
- He doesn't get a lot to do this week, but Martok really is a delight.
- Well, we know now who Damar is; and now I understand why everyone was amused when I didn't pay attention to him in his first episode. It's great how even someone as unlikable as Dukat's second in command has understandable, and even kind of relatable, reasons for why he does what he does. He's another of those true believer types; Ziyal's refusal to live up to Dukat's expectations is an insult to everything he holds dear.
- "A penance must be exacted," is the phrase the Prophets use. Dun dun dunnnnn.
- Nog is an ensign now! I love his relationship with O'Brien; the writers have done a very good job of toning the character down without losing his essential Nog-ness.
- "The Link... was paradise. But it appears I'm not ready for paradise." It's comments like this that make me worry about you, Odo.
- "I forgive you too," Dukat says, and hands Sisko his baseball. Um. Yay?

Next week: We're going to drop this section. Next week, we'll do the next two episodes like we always do.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “You Are Cordially Invited...”/“Resurrection”[Zack Handlen](#)[10/03/13 10:00AM](#)**“You Are Cordially Invited...”(season six, episode seven; originally aired 11/10/1997)***In which Dax and Worf get hitched...*

So, Worf and Dax are getting married. Huh. I guess that makes sense? I mean, they’ve been dating for a while, and Worf did propose, and Dax did say yes, so, well. That’s that, really. Hurrah for them. Had to happen eventually, or whatever.

It’s hard to work up much enthusiasm for the nuptials of a relationship which has never been entirely believable. Terry Farrell and Michael Dorn do their best, and the constant attempts to hammer home that these two characters are deeply committed to, and deeply passionate about, each other has at least managed to make the couple vaguely plausible. Dax is into strong, stern types who give her someone to bounce off of while keeping her grounded; Worf digs a woman who can love him and poke fun at his self-seriousness (which actually makes sense, given the little we know of his romantic history). Sure, I’ll buy it. I’m not exactly happy about it, and the two of them sucking face in a corridor is never going down in the history of TV’s steamiest scenes, but everybody knows that one couple that doesn’t make a damn bit of sense, but ends up together anyway. It doesn’t seem like a tragedy, but it also isn’t a connection that can sustain a lot of dramatic weight. It’s character wallpaper. If the writers want to make it happen, fine, but I don’t want to stare at it.

Which means I was understandably nervous about watching a wedding episode specifically centered on the Dax and Worf nuptials. Thankfully, there wasn't much to worry about. "You Are Cordially Invited..." keeps things light throughout, and with enough character moments and subplots that the script (by Ronald D. Moore) never gets overly bogged down in needing to be romantic or passionate or anything all that serious. As some of you noted, there's some fine O'Brien and Bashir banter. Martok continues to be the ideal Klingon. The Odo/Kira story moves forward in a small, but satisfying, way. And while sure, there's a plot about Dax trying to impress her prospective mother-in-law that gets mildly intense, it all ends up happy without a whole lot of fuss. After six intense episodes of war and betrayal and sacrifice, it's good to have something pleasant to remind us the show has settings other than "despair" and "hard-fought, mildly ambiguous victory."

Really, it's just great to see everyone back on the station where they belong. Sisko is especially pleased; his charming/slightly awkward conversation about how glad he is to be back sets the tone for an hour of people not quite seeing what the other person is getting at, but going along with it anyway. The most obvious pay-off for this comes in the hour's most obvious joke. Haha, Worf invites his friends to a Klingon bachelor party, and we all know what that means! If you guessed, "deprivation and physical suffering in the name of elusive symbolism dedicated to Klingon history," then yeah, that's it. Everyone else, including Bashir and O'Brien, seem to expect some kind of crazed drink-and-fuck party. While I get that Klingons can have a great time when they want to, you'd think somebody in the group would do some research before the actual event to get an idea of what they were in for. Worf is not exactly the crazy-bachelor type.

But that would've spoiled Bashir and O'Brien's reaction, and since thinking you're going to have a good time and getting a bad time instead is one of the tried and true comedy scenarios, it seems poor sporting to nitpick. The scenes are well-handled, too: They convey the idea without focusing too much on the particulars (the highlight being Bashir's decision that he needs to kill Worf while he and O'Brien are hanging over a pit of, I want to say lava?). This storyline also brings back Alexander, who has settled in nicely to a routine of being kind of a klutz, but not hating himself about it. He's more likeable now that he's eager, and Worf seems to clearly value his son again, without judging him for his imperfections. It's a surprising choice. Normally, I would've expected Alexander to make sudden miraculous improvements in skill level, and to see Worf be proud of how far the young man has come. Instead, we get a well-meaning, but not particularly adept, young warrior, and Worf is cool with it. This isn't stressed or underlined, but it makes both characters come off better.

Dax also comes off well in this episode, although maybe not in quite the way the writers intended. In order to marry Worf, Dax needs to be accepted by Worf's adoptive family; Martok is fine, but Martok's wife Sirella (Shannon Cochran) has some basic objections to inter-species relationships. She's also the classic stiff-backed, shout-centric Klingon woman, which goes with Dax's more laid-back approach to life about as well as you'd expect. The whole thing comes to a head at Dax's bachelorette party, where everyone is having a hell of a time right up until Sirella storms in and demands Dax put an end to the festivities. Which, it soon becomes clear, is basically what Dax is going for; she has second thoughts about the wedding, she doesn't want to change, she still thinks of herself too much as Curzon, that

sort of thing. Sisko tells her to shape up, reminds her she still loves Worf, and makes way for the happy ending.

What's interesting about this sequence is that Dax is at her most compelling when she's fighting back against Sirella's demands. It's not even a simple matter of an underdog showing her teeth. The whole relationship with Worf has been a constant run of Dax having to adapt herself to Worf's values and needs; he dictated the course of the wedding, he makes the demands. Admittedly, Dax has chosen to accept this, and there's no sense that he dominates her, or that he's somehow forcing her to accede to his wishes. Dax is, in a sense, the older and more experienced of the two, and the symbiote has been married a number of times before. In terms of basic decency, I don't think this is some kind of ugly pairing based on sublimated abuse. But in terms of narrative, and in terms of Dax's presence on the show, she's been swallowed up by Worf. Either she's reacting to him sarcastically, she's demonstrating her love for him, or she's in the background. It's not a total disappearance, and hopefully the marriage will get her some autonomy again, but the few times she stands up for herself, even if it's ill-advised—well, at least it's something.

Other than that, there's little to report. Jake “sold” his first book of short stories—i.e., he's getting a book published, but since the Federation doesn't have money, he's not getting a thing in return for it but pride. Martok gives good relationship advice. And Odo and Kira are, after a brief period of awkwardness, speaking with each other again. The last is a slight storyline, occupying no more than a handful of scenes, but it's worth taking the time to make sure these two characters are able to put the events of the recent past behind them. To pretend they could simply ignore what had happened would be dishonest, but to imply that their friendship was beyond repair would've been needlessly melodramatic. The station was saved, Rom wasn't executed, and in the end, Odo did the right thing. There's nothing that happened that a night spent talking in a closet can't fix.

Stray observations:

- “There's going to be a party, isn't there?” “You're asking me?” Oh Alexander, you are delightfully dorky.
- Quark calls Worf a “walking frown.” Quark is the best.
- Hey, remember how Ziyal is dead? No one else seems to. I understand the limits of serialization, but considering how the character was shot at the end of the previous episode, you'd think we'd at least get a moment of sadness for someone. But then, Garak isn't around. Maybe he's off plotting revenge somewhere.
- That was some dress, huh?
- “How hollow is the sound of victory without someone to share it with?” —Martok, speaking truth

“Resurrection” (season six, episode eight; originally aired 11/17/1997)*In which we had to hit a road bump eventually...*

I’ve made all the objections I can think of to the show’s ongoing interest in the Mirror Universe. It’s a fun idea that has run its course. There’s little dramatic investment in characters we only occasionally see, regardless of who’s playing them. The whole concept of a mirror universe is difficult to sustain, especially since the more we see of it, the more the “good guys” have to win, which goes against the whole point of thing in the first place. It’s awful to watch writers you trust latch on to a bad idea and refuse to let go, and the one shining light in all of this is that no one working behind the scenes on *DS9* has let this get completely out of hand. Every once in a while, we get a MU episode. They tend to get worse as the show goes on, but it’s not like there’s a saga or anything. In a way, it’s a bit like Lwaxana Troi’s once-a-season visits to the *Enterprise* on [Star Trek: The Next Generation](#). Sometimes they’d be entertaining, and if they weren’t, well, you just accepted the sacrifice and moved on.

So I’m hoping against hope this will be the last we see of the MU this season, even if we don’t actually see the universe itself at any point in the hour. Getting it out of the way early is a relief. But man, did it have to be so boring? Of all the people to bring back, of all the regulars and secondary characters and guest stars to give the spotlight to, who the hell thought Bareil would be a good idea? To his credit, writer Michael Taylor at least tries to give the other Bareil a more interesting past than the dead Vedek had; this new version is a rogue in the Han Solo vein, and makes his entrance by beaming into Ops and taking Kira hostage at disruptor-point.

But Philip Anglim isn’t suited to the lovable rogue type. He tries his best, but his performance largely consists of mumbles and strained smiles. More than anything, he reminded me of the scientist-hero-forehead-delivery-system of the 1956 B-movie *The She Creature*. If you get a chance, look it up on YouTube; I saw it through the [Mystery Science Theater 3000 treatment](#), and Mike and the bots’ mockery of the lead’s acting style ran through my head this entire episode.

That made it difficult to take anything seriously, but to be honest, there isn’t much of anything that deserved the attention in “Resurrection.” The central conflict: Kira sees the new Bareil (who I’m just going to refer to as “Bareil” from now on, since the Vedek is dead, and this version isn’t a Vedek), is confused, then slowly but surely ends up falling for him—and he for her. But it’s all a ruse because he’s there on orders from Kira’s crazy double, the Intendant. (Does she even have her old job anymore? I can’t remember.) The other Kira is also on DS9, presumably having beamed over at the same time Bareil did in order to cover her tracks, and she’s still all campy and kind of evil and pretty much insane. She wants Bareil to steal the Bajoran’s Orb so they can bring it back to their reality. Which I guess makes sense if you think of her as a floating ball of malevolence, which is basically what she is at this point.

I used to like the Intendant. I used to think it was fun to watch Nana Visitor go all sultry and wicked and what-not. But it gets old, like caricatures are wont to do, but the character is embarrassing now—forced and needy and pointless. I don’t know if Visitor’s performance has gotten worse, although I

don't think that's it; there's just no core threat behind her anymore. Outside the context of her universe, she's just a goofball playing dress up and wanting to fuck everything that movies. Which, hey, bully for her, but it's like watching someone try and keep the party going after everyone else has left. There's no menace, no allure, no mystery. She's just an easily betrayed twerp who doesn't seem capable of learning lessons from her past.

Watching someone get foiled again by yet another duplicitous lover isn't the most fun way to spend an hour, and "Resurrection" also makes the strange mistake of downplaying Kira's experience with Bareil over Bareil's experience of becoming a (slightly) better man. This is partly because a good third of the episode has Bareil and the Intendant plotting and Kira being none the wiser, which limits the amount of time we can spend on Kira wondering if she's making good life choices. But there's still Bareil's slow spiritual shift, and his struggle between normal amazing Kira and rabid sex kitten Kira, and who really cares about that? It would be one thing if Anglim was charismatic or fun to watch, but he isn't, really. He's as dull as he was back when he played the Vedek—but then, his stillness was supposed to indicate a kind of inner peace. Here, it's just a lot of nothing.

Which is unfortunate. Kira-centric episodes don't happen every week, and this one is a waste of everyone's time. The romantic relationship at the center never digs into the creepiness that drives it: How much is she hooking up with Bareil because she's interested in him, and how much is it just the fact that he looks like the dead man she once loved? If Kira had started going full *Vertigo* on Bareil, then we might have had something. Additionally, the actual plot stalls early and often. What used to make the Mirror Universe episodes so exciting was their sense of scope; a whole other setting to play in where everything was almost, but not quite, completely different than it ought to be. But over time, that scope has narrowed to the point where it's almost painful to watch. It's time to close the door on this particular concept for good. (I know the show won't, though.)

Stray observations:

- So, we get two Dax-and-Kira scenes this week, and both of them fail the Bechdel test. Why can't they have as much fun as O'Brien and Bashir?
- There's a moment early on when Bareil is dragging Kira out of Ops that I was fairly convinced the actor was copping a feel.
- Bareil and Kira have dinner with Worf and Dax. I was convinced this would be a terrible idea, but it was fine. Which is the whole hour, in the dulllest possible way.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "Statistical Probabilities"/"The Magnificent Ferengi"[Zack Handlen](#)[10/10/13 10:00AM](#)**"Statistical Probabilities" (season six, episode 9; originally aired 11/24/1997)***In which Bashir gets a little too much brain...*

Ever since the Truth About Bashir was revealed last season, the writers have struggled to find a way to deal with it. Well, maybe that's presuming too much—maybe they didn't really give a damn. But post-reveal, the good doctor has been reduced to a handful exchanges about statistical probabilities, and some of the usual great banter with O'Brien. Nothing wrong with the latter, and the former has been largely minimized, just a touch of character to remind us that the situation has changed. Still, he comes across as less friendly than he used to, less charming and aggressively eager to please. There's something fundamentally sad about Bashir these days, and it's a choice I'm not sure what to make of. Maybe it's the war, maybe it's the stress of having to be "himself" in front of people who probably don't look at him the same way they used to, but the guy has turned into a bit of a bummer. This is a shame, really, because it's been so one-note so far. Outside of ["You Are Cordially Invited..."](#), Bashir has spent his time this season looking like a man in the grips of an ongoing depressive episode. In real life, I'd ask him what was wrong; in fiction, either he needs to cheer the hell up, or he needs a focus episode that explains what has him in such a bad mood.

"Statistical Probabilities" isn't exactly that episode, but it's close enough. The focus is on a group of genetically engineered super geniuses who have spent most of their lives institutionalized; they're "enhancements" left them so unstable that they were unable to simulate normal behavior at a young

age, which led to them to being identified and locked away. It's easy to feel sorry for them—unlike Bashir, who could keep his improvements secret until it became dramatically convenient to reveal them, these kids (adults now) had their lives fundamentally altered by their parents in a way they have no control over whatsoever. But it becomes clear very early on that while this is a group of victims, the laws that put them away aren't entirely to blame. Jack, Lauren, Patrick, and Sarina are fractured, deeply damaged individuals, and while they have intellectual abilities far beyond normal humans, they also have certain trade-offs that limit their functionality in polite society. Jack is aggressive, fast-talking, and perpetually on edge; Lauren is—well, okay, all we ever really get from her is that she's seductive-ish, but since this never impacts the narrative in anyway at all, I guess we should just assume she's some kind of sex/power addict and move on? Patrick is childlike and easily insulted. Sarina doesn't talk.

As crazies go, this isn't exactly *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. In terms of depth, the four guests are little more than cliché, and the pathos of their situation comes mostly from Bashir's discussions with the rest of the crew about how guilty he feels about them. Yet that's enough, really. The story here isn't the plight of a group of thinly sketched oddities who we'll most likely never see again (and if we do see them again, chances are there will be more time to get to know them better); this is Bashir coming to grips once again with his gifts, and trying to find a way to make up for his own good fortune by helping people like him who were less lucky in their circumstances. Instead of focusing on Bashir's efforts to "cure" anyone, the episode introduces the idea that the group might actually be able to contribute meaningfully to society by having them demonstrate their uncanny knack for deduction. This makes more sense than any kind of therapy would have, given that therapy isn't really Bashir's job (or something he's been trained at, as far as we know); it's also more dramatically interesting. While the metaphor is never explicit, these people are largely interesting for the way they represent paths Bashir might have gone down, had fortune not smiled on him as it did. In helping them, he tries to atone for his luck, and assuage his guilt.

Their abilities manifest in two ways: The group is highly sensitive to body language and vocal cues, which allows them to intuit secrets and motives people wish to conceal; they are then able to take that knowledge and use it to extrapolate far out into the future, via mathematical models of probability. The former knack for interpolating subtle, and unintentional, psychological "tells" is taken as a given, although the contrast between the characters' insight into others, and their apparent inability to use that insight to better balance their own lives is a minor tragedy. It's the sort of tragedy we've gotten used to through years of movies and television shows about geniuses incapable of living "normal," healthy lives, but while the concept has become a cliché by now, there's still some truth to it. Most regular interaction doesn't benefit from extensive analysis. When a co-worker asks you "How are you?", if the answer takes you ten minutes to come up with and involves an extensive monologue about how a difficult relationship with your siblings has left you with a fundamental distrust of group settings and potlucks, you are doing it wrong.

But while Jack, Patrick, Lauren, Sarina are given opportunity to demonstrate just how poorly they'd do at dinner parties, the real heart of the episode comes from their second gift, that uncanny knack for

foresight. Well, maybe “uncanny” is too far, given that we don’t see any of their predictions come true, but they seem pretty confident, and Bashir trusts them. He trusts them so much, in fact, that’s he’s willing to bring their ultimate vision of the future to Sisko, with the hope that he’ll pass the idea onto Starfleet: the Dominion is going to win the war, and it’s in the Federation’s best interests to surrender.

That goes over about as well as you’d expect, and it’s Sisko’s reaction, and Bashir’s grasp of reality, that leads to what happens next. But what’s really cool about all of this is that even though no one applies a specific name to the process, what the group of crazies is doing is basically a form of psychohistory, a term invented by Isaac Asimov in his *Foundation* series. The *Foundation* books follow the course of a civilization formed in the waning days of the Galactic Empire; mathematician and all-around smart guy Hari Seldon charted the future of that civilization (and provided various recorded messages to serve as warnings/advice for each major crisis) through a process he’d perfected that used statistical probabilities and information on crowd psychology to project the behavior of groups of people on a large scale. The central point is that societies are easier to predict than individuals, and that the behavior of individuals can rarely influence society substantially enough to affect significant change.

That’s pretty much the message of this episode, although the resolution is more humanistic than Asimov’s. When the Federation rejects their “surrender” proposal, Jack and the others decide that the only way to move forward is to talk to the Dominion directly. Now that Dukat has been deposed, Damar has risen to take his place, and he and Weyoun are on the station to negotiate a temporary truce (which the crazies realize is just an excuse to get access to a planet that will allow them to manufacture more white). Even as a Gul, Damar remains a secondary figure, serving more to fill an absence than out of any real ability of his own, a fact that Weyoun isn’t going to let him forget any time soon. When Jack (or one of the group; Jack comes off as the leader, so let’s just say it was him) contacts the pair with an offer of Starfleet secrets, he couldn’t have picked a better time. Where Dukat might have been (needlessly) suspicious, both Damar and Weyoun are eager to prove themselves, and the result would almost certainly have been disastrous.

Instead, Sarina saves the day; given that she’s the only member of the group who doesn’t have any lines, it’s not entirely surprising that she gets left behind when the others go to meet Weyoun, and it’s also not a huge shock that Bashir is able to talk her into letting him go. Masters of spycraft, these folks are not. Bashir tries to sell Sarina’s behavior as proof of the flaws in the group’s predictions, but in truth Jack and the other’s own behavior is proof enough; if they’d succeeded in bringing information to Weyoun and Damar, then the three of them would’ve single-handedly changed the course of the war. Admittedly, that change would’ve mostly been about shortening the duration of the fight, and not altering the outcome, but it’s still a substantial change, and the fact that none of the group seemed to realize the holes they’d poked in their own theory is the proof of the fallacy of their reasoning. After all, their whole lives have been in an institution; while they are understandably arrogant about their intellects, their perspective on the universe is narrow and academic. They trust their judgment because it is often all they have left. Which doesn’t mean that they should be ignored or marginalized; just that they need to learn the valuable lesson of taking their conclusions with a few

grains of salt. (It would also be helpful if they had a better understand of how others would react to their findings.) And hell, the war isn't over yet. They might even turn out to be right.

Stray observations:

- It's been a while since I read *Foundation*, but I remember the thrust of the original trilogy being that, even if anomalies occur (and the anomaly Asimov comes up with is pretty damn cool), science will adjust. I also remember the third book being somewhat sad. "Statistical Probabilities" is less concerned with the efficacy of the math involved than it is with the shortcomings of the minds behind that math. And really, it's mostly just a way for Bashir to deal openly for a bit with what his life is like now.
- As for that, well, Bashir has a couple good exchanges with O'Brien (who's still making him stand back when they play darts), and a nice conversation with the rest of the ensemble over dinner. He also gets to say goodbye to everyone before they leave, so there are no hard feelings about the knocked-unconscious-and-tied-up situation. There's no real resolution for the doctor, at least in terms of his general grumpiness, but at least things don't end too terribly.
- The sight of Bashir brandishing multiple PADDs cracked me up.

"The Magnificent Ferengi" (season six, episode 10; originally aired 1/1/1998)

In which Quark proves his mettle...

Is this the best Ferengi-centric episode I've seen so far? I want to say so, but I feel like that doesn't go far enough. This isn't just a great episode by the standards of *Trek's* most aggravating major race, it's a fine episode by any judgement you put on it, a clever, well-paced adventure that manages the all important trick of being funny without ever losing sight of the stakes. This is a "comedic" episode about Quark's desperate efforts to rescue his mother from the Dominion, and it (almost) never comes across as pandering or strained. This isn't as deep as episodes earlier in the season, and while life or death is on the line, it's not as though Quark and his team of mercenaries are fighting for the survival of the Alpha Quadrant. But it's important to have a narrow focus on occasion, to make sure we understand why we root for these people when the scope pulls back to encompass the whole universe. Also, "the Magnificent Ferengi" does a *Weekend At Bernie's* riff, and I normally hate those, but this one was pretty brilliant.

I don't want to oversell the hour here: There's nothing devastating, or even particularly emotional, going on behind the scenes, and even though we see the death of a familiar face, it's not an end that's going to bring a tear to anyone's eye. But this one was a surprisingly effective, and surprisingly entertaining, entry in a format I'd long since given up hope would ever really excite me. Generally speaking, I'm not a fan of *Trek's* intentionally comedic episodes, for reasons I've dealt with at tedious length before. Most of the time, the franchise suffers from a lack of humor chops that means instead

of a witty, madcap farce, we get a lot of soggy, predictable jokes and some lazy plotting. Oh, and there's also "sentiment," which generally reduces what little humor there is to something even less effective, smoothing out edges and re-assuring the audience that none of what we see really matters, so there's no need to get worked up about it. But for a funny story to be, well, funny, it needs to matter as much to the people involved as a more serious story would. Laughter is, in its way, an answer to despair and fear, a coping mechanism in the face of a frequently cruel, regularly maddening reality that so often sees fit to give us the exact opposite of what we truly need. Make things safe, build a gag on the lie that nothing hurts and everything is fine forever, and what's there to laugh about?

"The Magnificent Ferengi" deals with this problem straight off the bat by giving us definite crisis. Sure, there's some setup focusing on Quark's wish that others would recognize and respect his prowess at the bargaining table in the same way they cheer Bashir, Dax, and O'Brien for their heroism in the field; this is an all-too obvious set-up for the character's episode arc, which has him starting at a point of low self-esteem before successfully resolving the plot through the bravery and cunning, thus proving to himself and his peers that he's just as much a hero as anybody. It's a cute, Disneyesque theme that works despite (or maybe because) of its obviousness. Even more, it works because the writers don't compromise who Quark is in order to give him a victory. That's part of the game. We want to see Quark succeed, but that success can't be too easy, and it has to be on his own terms, or else it will play like a cheat. The dramatic impact of the episode—that cheerful feeling that comes at the end when the bad guys are vanquished and Quark has his dignity back—only matters if it was fairly earned. If Quark had turned into some kind of fearsome bad-ass, laying waste to Jem'Hadar without a second thought, or if the whole thing had hinged on coincidence and sloppy plotting, it wouldn't have been as effective.

But I was talking about a crisis, right? Moogie—as in Ishka, as in Quark and Rom's beloved, ambitious mother—has been taken captive by the Dominion, and the Grand Nagus has ordered Quark to get her back. The setup for this is probably the weakest part of the episode: a long conversation with Quark and Rom that only works because of how it's staged (they're crawling around the ventilation ducts, and end up popping out in Sisko's office; Avery Brooks' reaction is fantastic). The weakness stems from the fact that we don't see the Nagus actually telling Quark what happened, but given how stuffed full the episode is, and given that Zek probably wouldn't have been much more than a walk-on, it makes sense that they didn't get Wallace Shawn. And however it's delivered, the premise is solid. Zek doesn't just want Quark's help; he's also offering a reward of fifty bars of latinum for Ishka's safe return. Which fits in with the episode's general commitment to simultaneously mocking and celebrating Ferengi culture. A Klingon would go on the mission for honor; a Ferengi does it because he loves his mom, and also because there's profit to be made.

There follows one of the most familiar, and one of the most delightful, structures in adventure stories: the getting-the-band-together sequence. Rom is a given, and Nog doesn't take much convincing (especially once he realizes he'll get to throw his weight around the group a bit, as the only member of the team with actual military training), but the guest stars pile on after. First there's Leck (Hamilton

Camp), a Ferengi hitman whom I can't remember having seen before; Memory Alpha has him connected to ["Ferengi Love Songs."](#) but if that's true, he didn't make much impression then. He definitely makes an impression in this episode, playing the role of the violence-loving mercenary who could, under the right circumstances, turn on everyone and murder them in their sleep. Then there's Gaila (Josh Pais), Quark's traitorous cousin, currently in jail after the events of ["Business As Usual."](#) Gaila doesn't have much of a reason to help Quark, but there are only so many recurring Ferengi the show can use in this context, which is why we also get the return of the magnificent Brunt, who, having lost his job at the F.C.A., is looking to get back into the Nagus's good graces.

The other major guest star of note for the hour is my favorite of the bunch: the completely unexpected Iggy Pop as the Vorta Yelgrun. Pop is delightful in the role, using his trademark deadpan to give the typically smarmy and sycophantic Vorta another distinctive spin. He and Keevan (who makes his second, and final, appearance here), represent two different takes on a very simple idea: complete and total disdain. Whereas Weyoun is all ingratiating smiles (only occasionally undercut by legitimate menace), these two show the real downside to leaving out aesthetic qualities in genetically engineered bureaucrats: They both seem to be suffering from severe depression, albeit in ways that don't make either of them very sympathetic. Hell, Keevan gets shot and spends the final moments of the hour as a crudely re-animated corpse transformed into a sight gag, and he's still not registering much higher than a "huh" on the empathy scale. (Although his "I hate Ferengi" exit line is hard to argue with.) To a large part "The Magnificent Ferengi" lives and dies on the strengths of its characters, and since there are so many of them, they need to make a strong impression with a minimum of screentime. While some of Quark's crew are more memorable than others, they're all the right mixture of loopy/entertaining, and Yelgrun makes for a perfect enemy.

Are there weak points in this? Well, Ishka doesn't really register, apart from a lousy "comedy" scene between her and Rom that is a great example of something the rest of the episode manages to avoid. This isn't make-or-break, as the story doesn't rely on her much, but it's shame that a character who was once so potentially interesting has been relegated to the sidelines. But it's hard to begrudge this particular episode for that failing. The sixth season hit a lull after the opening run of more heavily serialized stories, but "The Magnificent Ferengi" represents a return to form; it's not as intense, or as thrilling, as those earlier entries could be, but it doesn't feel as disinterested as "Resurrection" or even as fine but not exactly memorable as "Statistical Probabilities." This is proof that *DS9* can still turn out great standalones, if anyone needed to see it.

Stray observations:

- Keevan gets roped into this because Quark realizes his best chance is to offer a prisoner exchange with the Dominion; Kira helps to make it happen as payment for Quark's heroism earlier in the season, so it's nice to know she doesn't totally despise him these days.
- Vorta are supposed to commit suicide before they're captured, which makes Keevan even more interesting. His betrayal of his Jem'Hadar soldiers was an extension of the Vorta's innate gift for manipulation turned towards self-preservation. But he's dead now so that's that.

- “Must’ve taken a wrong turn.” “It looks that way.” Just the look on Sisko’s face here.

Next week: This feature is going to be going on hiatus for a little while, probably until early November. This is my choice; I've just got too much on my plate right now to do these write-ups properly. I'll be back as soon as I can. (I mean, I'll still be writing a ton of reviews for the site, so it's not like I'm lost or anything.) Thanks, as ever, for your patience.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "Waltz"/"Who Mourns For Morn?"[Zack Handlen](#)[11/07/13 10:00AM](#)**"Waltz" (season 6, episode 11; originally aired 1/8/1998)***In which Dukat and Sisko dance, but Dukat finds other partners...*

How do you solve a problem like Gul Dukat? Former Gul Dukat, actually; I doubt he still retains his position post breakdown and capture. (Maybe he does. I'm not an expert on Cardassian bureaucracy/power structures.) But the point isn't his title: the point is figuring out what to do with a character who's had the most dramatic rises and falls of anyone on the series. Dukat has been a commandant, an officiant, a father bent on murder, a revolutionary, a dictator, and, lately, a man with a broken mind, tormented by the simultaneous loss of his daughter (who, let's remember, he was once determined to kill) and his thorough beating at the hands of anti-Dominion forces. When we meet him at the start of "Waltz," after a long introductory voice-over from Sisko explaining the current situation—Dukat's been in therapy, and is now heading to the Federation for some preliminary legal proceedings—he seems well enough. But over the course of the hour, we learn that Dukat is a deeply damaged individual, fractured and tormented in ways that are very likely irreparable. After spending time with the Cardassian under unusual circumstances, Sisko draws certain conclusions, solving Dukat as neatly as Alexander solved a certain knot: the enemy is an evil man, and Sisko is determined to stop him.

While there's no question Dukat has evil in him, I'm not sure I agree with Sisko's line in the sand pronouncement. It makes sense from a character perspective; Sisko is a smart, determined fighter, but

he's always been more warrior than philosopher, and in situations where something he cares about is threatened, he's not going to quibble too much about details. Sisko reacts to crises emotionally as much as intellectually, and that passion typically serves him well. His decision here, after seeing Dukat rant and rave for days before swearing to destroy all that Bajor is, is the sort of decision that *DS9* handles better than any other *Trek* series before it: an in-character beat that is perfectly satisfying (if maybe a little over-the-top), but that doesn't necessarily line up with our own view of the situation. Dukat doesn't come across well in "Waltz," and his final speech is a few screams shy of a Batman villain rant, but the fact that we get to see the demons he's fighting against make him more complex than Sisko's determination allows. The final shot of Dukat as he closes the shuttle's rear door, with the trio of phantasms crowded behind him, is telling. He is a man haunted by his crimes, but incapable of understanding what's haunting him. The only response left is to double down on villainy, and while it's necessary to condemn such a choice, I find it hard not have some pity for the fool who makes it.

"Waltz" is a tricky episode, using a set-up that we've seen before—namely, characters alone together in less than ideal circumstances (it's sort of what happened with Kira and Dukat in ["Indiscretion"](#))—and a gimmick with a high chance of failure, ie "let's visualize my madness through the power of imaginary people." There are plenty of ways this could've gone wrong, and the crazed intensity of so much Marc Alaimo's performance throughout regularly borders on camp, but it works. This is playing-at-the-edges stuff, trying to understand what drives Dukat without softening him or making that understanding too simplistic. Having phantom versions of Weyoun, Damar, and Kira appear at various times to allow Dukat's inner turmoil external expression is a clever idea, but not an automatically effective one. At times, it threatens to make the various crises he's struggling with too obvious. Weyoun appearing in a scene the first time we see Dukat alone is a heck of a shock, but once it's clear that he's just an imaginary friend (albeit one Dukat doesn't realize is imaginary), his presence loses much of its impact. Weyoun and the others can't effect events; they can only inform us of Dukat's character, like how Dukat has doubts about whether or not he should keep Sisko alive, and how he also judges himself harshly for his failures. All of which is good information to have, but doesn't in and of itself justify the gimmick.

What makes Dukat's hallucinations work, I think, is how they build. Individually, Weyoun, Damar, and Kira are entertaining but unnecessary. Weyoun is Dukat's loathing of his "weaker" self, while Damar is Dukat's Cardassian pride speaking out; Kira is his complicated relationship with Bajor, manifesting both as a symbol of what he can never have, and proof that his enemy was always looking to misinterpret his actions to serve their own needs. They give the script a way to illuminate Dukat's mind without resorting to simple monologues, but it's such an obvious device that it's a little distracting to watch. But once the figures start popping up while Dukat is arguing his case with Sisko, things get interesting. While the episode is often ostensibly through Dukat's eyes (after all, we can see things that he sees, even when Sisko can't), the primary tension comes from figuring out just why the Cardassian was willing to save his off-and-on nemesis, and what that decision means for Sisko's immediate future. As Dukat's desperation to win an ideological discussion with Sisko intensifies, the harbingers of his

madness grow stronger; we're privy to the interjections from Dukat's psyche, but Sisko is not, which creates a fascinating, and unsettling, back and forth.

So why does Dukat save Sisko? He does it more than once, first saving his enemy when the ship they're in is attacked, and then building Sisko a cast for his broken arm (Dukat claims he can't use the bone regenerator device, which could very well be true; it could also be true that he wants to keep his edge). At the end of the episode, Sisko briefly gets an advantage over Dukat, only for the Cardassian to tackle him and beat him before fleeing in a shuttle. Dukat's behavior in those final moments is, if anything, even stranger; before there was a sense that he was trying, in his fundamentally broken way, to justify himself, but his final speech is a declaration of war and he still lets Sisko live. (He even contacts the Defiant to let them know where the captain is.) Admittedly, Sisko has to live; between the two, Dukat is the only potentially expendable one, and it seems the writers still have stories they want to tell about him. But there's also a decent in-story reason for why Sisko doesn't die, and it's something that works to keep this more complicated than a simple bad-guy-takes-good-guy-hostage scenario.

Ostensibly the conflict of the episode comes from Sisko's attempts to contact a rescue ship, attempts which are first stymied by Dukat sabotaging the emergency beacon (I love the fake out when we think the Defiant finally got the signal; I also love how visibly disappointed everyone is when they beam two survivors aboard who aren't Sisko), and then by Dukat's decision to vaporize the beacon entirely. But while this conflict makes for solid suspense, it's not really the heart of "Waltz." The heart is Dukat's increasingly deranged attempts to convince Sisko of his righteousness, attempts which ultimately only serve to push the two characters even further apart. These attempts fit in well with what we know of Dukat from the past, a man who once told Weyoun that the most important victory was in beating your enemies so thoroughly that they are forced to admit your inherent superiority. Something in him can't just be satisfied with winning, the way, say, Damar would be satisfied. He needs to be acknowledged.

This is an odd quirk to have, although (credit to the writers and Marc Alaimo, who is never short of excellent) it's one that always makes sense even if it's difficult to grasp where it's coming from. If Dukat really is a psychopath through and through, it's curious that he would so desperately need the reassurance of others that he wasn't. It's especially curious that the people he turns to for that assurance—Sisko in this episode, Kira in the past (yes, he's romantically interested in her, but a large part of the attraction comes from how much she loathes him; seducing her would be just another way of proving his point)—are the people least likely to accept his overtures.

This may be what turns Sisko so sharply against his enemy in the end: not just Dukat's big villain speech (which is spectacular, although we'll see how it plays out), but the manic determination with which Dukat demands his behavior be accepted as just. Because if Dukat can go this crazy in wanting his enemies to accept him, surely there's some part of him that realizes what he's done is wrong. He states repeatedly that the Bajorans are inferior to Cardassians, and yet it's Bajorans—and a representative of Bajoran culture—whom he turns to to reassure him that he's right. Which implies

that deep down, in some small miserable part of himself, he must he recognize his error, and that recognition is what drives him mad. Sisko's decision to turn on Dukat, to make their contest a him-or-me scenario, is probably the only choice he could make under the circumstances. But for us watching on the outside, it's still possible to feel some kind of pity. Dukat is doomed by circumstance, culture, and his own brutal ambition. He's a monster, but what made him?

Stray observations:

- While I understand the need to show the rest of the ensemble doing their best to track Sisko down, the conflict of the Defiant having a strict deadline for their search is pretty forced. Yes, it's a time of war, which means that resources are limited, but Kira's insistence that "You only have 52 hours!" is really just there to create false tension. If Sisko had ended the episode unrescued, that would've been something, but as is, every scene off planet is kind of a waste of time. (Did you know that Worf values his honor? I did not. Also, Bashir does not care for Worf's honor when Sisko is in danger. Gasp!)
- "From the moment we arrived on Bajor, it was clear that we were the superior race." The conversation isn't in a courtroom, but that line is basically Dukat's version of Col. Jessup's "You're goddamn right I did!" from *A Few Good Men*.
- "I should have killed them all." "And that is why you're not an evil man." Sisko, being sarcastic and knocking a dude out.

"Who Mourns For Morn?" (season 6, episode 12; originally aired 2/4/1998)

What can you say about Morn? He's a fine bit of effects work and a decent running gag. I'm not sure any of the jokes about him—he doesn't talk, but everyone complains how he never shuts up, and Dax had a thing for him—have ever made me laugh, but they're amusing enough. The jokes feel less like determined attempts at humor, and more like the writers intentionally winking at the audience; yeah, we know you've noticed this guy, let's have some fun with him, hm? There's something charming about the whole idea. "Fan service" doesn't exactly apply (unless there is a very specific fetish out there for giant mute toadstool dudes), but there's a definite meta vibe to the concept, in a way that seldom touches the rest of the show's world. *Deep Space Nine* never pretends it's a documentary, but it also doesn't go out of its way to remind us that what we're watching is staged. But Morn jokes do. It's cute, and the sort of thing which could easily be over-played; so far, at least, the writers have avoided that trap.

"Who Mourns For Morn?" sounds like it could be a very bad idea. Morn dies! Quark has to deal with the aftermath! Delving into the secret past of a one-note character is a tricky proposition, especially if that past is supposed to have any weight at all; thankfully, Morn's does not. Strip away the name, and what you have here is a familiar template for the show: Quark gets in over his head. This time, it's not through any real fault of his own. He tries to make some profit off of Morn's death, in his Quark-ish way (this pays off later when we learn that both O'Brien and Bashir are invested in keeping Morn's

seat warm), and then discovers, much to his delight, that the old barfly named Quark as the sole beneficiary of his will. Quicker than you can say “I saw this coming,” Quark soon learns that Morn left behind 1000 bars of gold-pressed latinum, as well as a group of rogues determined to get their share of the latinum by any means necessary.

It’s time for Quark to play increasingly annoyed straight (well, maybe slightly bent) man to a bunch of greedy, lying sociopaths. Which is fun—reminds me a bit of the first season episode [“The Nagus,”](#) in that someone fakes a death (spoiler!) and Quark has to deal with the fall out. Everyone keeps lying to everyone else for various reasons: there’s the seductive “ex-wife” Larell (Bridget White), who claims a share of the inheritance and keeps rubbing Quark’s ears to get what she wants; there are the brothers Krit (Brad Greenquist) and Nahsk (Cyril O’Reilly), creepy lizard-like dudes who insist Morn owes them money from a previous business arrangement; and then there’s Hain (Gregory Itzin, aka President Charles Logan from 24), ostensibly a member of law enforcement determined to return the bars of latinum to the Royal Family of Luria, who bequeathed the bars to Morn after he stepped down as Crown Prince. All of which is more or less bullshit. Turns out Morn got up to some shenanigans in his past, and when he did, this was the crew he used; together, they plotted and executed the Lissepian Mother’s Day heist, and have spent the last decade or so waiting for the statute of limitations to pass so they could claim their prize. With Morn “dead,” each member of the group targets Quark as their ticket to a bigger slice of the latinum, only to ultimately turn on each other when the money arrives and it’s just stacks of worthless gold.

It’s all pretty delightful, if somewhat limited. The attempts to fill in Morn’s character don’t have much value, because Morn is a prop, not a character; with all due respect to Mark Allen Shepherd (who, out of costume, was the first person Quark asked to fill Morn’s seat), the fact that Morn can speak but isn’t allowed to speak on camera means there’s only so much the writers can do with him. It would be different if Morn was mute, or incapable of communicating through language, but as it is, every scene with him has to be short and a little awkward. Hain lies about Morn being a member of the Royal Family, but the lie is neither more nor less convincing than the “truth” that he’s a criminal mastermind. The fact that Morn pulled off this whole scheme to screw over his former associates and make sure he ended up with the lion’s share of the loot makes sense, and it’s nice to know that we’ll be seeing him in the background of the bar in episode’s to come. Anything more in-depth than that is an impossibility, which is, to its credit, something that writer Mark Gehred-O’Connell seems to realize.

The real focus of “Who Mourns For Morn?” is Quark, and while it’s curious to see him get another focus episode so soon after the last, he’s really the only one who could’ve pulled this off. I mean, maybe Bashir, but as the only person on DS9 with even mildly shady ethics (apart from Garak, but if it’d been Garak, the rest of the crew would’ve never have stood a chance too obviously), Quark’s greed and fundamental likability means that it’s possible for him to get involved with some questionable figures without immediately calling in Odo; it also means we root for him to get some return on his investment, even while knowing that there’s no way in hell he’ll get the full 1000 bricks. In the end, Quark doesn’t learn a whole lot, except that clever people in his life have a tendency to exploit him for their own ends, which is something I would’ve hoped Quark would’ve realized a long

time ago. He does end up with some latinum (regurgitated from Morn's second stomach), and the bad guys are sent to jail, even though none of them seem all that much worse than Morn, who makes out fine. Still, it's a happy ending all around, and to pick this one apart any further would be to ruin the fun.

Stray observations:

- Quark hits a level of minor irritation early on and just sticks with it throughout the hour. It sets the tone for the episode quite nicely.
- The title, "Who Mourns For Morn," is a play on "Who Mourns For Adonais?", a title of an episode from the original Star Trek's second season. (Which was, in turn, a reference to a Percy Bysshe Shelley poem, but my learning only goes so far.)
- We get it: gold isn't valuable in the future. No need to rub it in.

Next week: By popular request, we're going to give "Far Beyond The Stars" its own slot.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "Far Beyond The Stars"[Zack Handlen](#)[11/14/13 10:00AM](#)**"Far Beyond The Stars" (season 6, episode 13; originally aired 2/11/1998)***In which Benny Russell writes his story...*

Metaphors are fine. Metaphors are, in fact, perfectly lovely and useful and amazing tools when it comes to telling stories. I love a good metaphor, because it's poetic and just plain fun, coming at your brain sideways in order to trick you into understanding an idea by making you think about something else. A metaphor can be a kind of code, a form of subversion that ostensibly secrets a powerful message inside a seemingly harmless framework. Want to talk about the horrors of war without mentioning a specific conflict? Throw on some fake ears and foley in a few laser blasts, and call the whole thing The Battle Of Kanak'Kar or something. Want to discuss sexual orientation and gender issues? Put everything on another planet, with aliens who look just like us but are slightly different, and have a ball. The metaphor becomes not just a tool inside the text, but the text (or visual medium) itself. It creates a cushion of distance between the subject and the presentation, and that distance allows everyone to contemplate potentially divisive or explosive topics from a remove. Maybe you can't change minds by tricking them, but it's a start, and it's better than staying silent, right?

Sometimes, though, a metaphor isn't enough. Sometimes you need to scream—not talk about screaming, not have someone scream in some different, made-up language that nerds will obsess over for years to come; not couch a scream in diffidence or bury it in poetry. Just scream. Maybe then, someone will hear you.

[*Star Trek*](#) has a long history of using science fiction tropes to deal with social issues. We did [a semi-jokey Inventory](#) on the subject four years ago, and it's always been a symbol of the franchise's noblest aims—to be more than just an adventure show, to have ambition beyond nifty monsters and star fields. But as admirable as that aim is, it's too often a clunky, heavy-handed way to moralize. Check that Inventory more closely, and you'll realize that while most of those episodes (and films) are fun, few of them rank in any of their respective series' best. Using a metaphor to tackle a controversial issue is an approach that reeks of putting message before story, which can easily turn into an excuse to lecture an audience; after all, most messages come with a specific moral value attached, which means there's little room for ambiguity or mystery. Force-feeding is rarely an effective means of storytelling or lesson teaching. At the time, it lets everyone pat themselves on the back for being progressive and clever; decades later, it looks pedantic, trite, and more than a little campy.

This isn't always the case. [*Star Trek: The Next Generation*](#) managed to do issue episodes better than the original series, and some of its attempts are very strong stuff. But even then, the metaphor works best when it deals in broad terms. [“Darmok”](#) is a fascinating examination of the difficulties of communication between cultures, and the challenge of finding common ground. You could apply it to any number of disastrous encounters between different races of humankind, but there's no need to. The fundamental truth transcends the specific. Something like [“The Outcast,”](#) which has Riker falling for an androgynous alien from a society where gender distinctions are harshly censured, succeeds, in part, because its soul isn't just about the persecution of the homosexual or the transgendered. If you want to, you can take a powerful statement on the importance of tolerance and respect for all sexual orientations from the episode. But you can also look on it as a critique of totalitarian governments. Or just a tragedy about Riker losing a friend. By tapping into the universal concepts underlying specific cultural problems, *TNG* was able to get their point across without being anchored to one view. It's a potent use of metaphor, and yet there's a distance to it. The separation between our world and the ones we see on screen means that commentary comes at a remove. The remove makes the criticism easier to take, but it also diminishes its impact. This isn't personal, the metaphor allows us to believe. We're only observing. We're not a part of this.

“Far Beyond The Stars” takes the metaphor and turns it inside out. It is not a subtle hour of television. It has its gimmicks, but the gimmicks are in no way relative to its effect. The double-casting—seeing familiar faces in different roles, seeing actors out of make-up, seeing Michael Dorn smiling—is fun to watch, but there's something sad about it, too; something lost and awkward and lonely. This is not an episode which holds back. There is no happy ending for its hero. Instead of using the illusions of fiction to cloak or obscure painful realities, writer Benny Russell (Avery Brooks) attempts transcendence. There is no comforting distance between us and his situation, no camouflage for his pain. Even the time (Benny is in 1953 America) isn't all that far away. There is no protection for an audience eager to cling to its illusions. This is a desperate man's effort to cling to sanity, to speak and be heard in a place which demands his silence. The metaphor is not there to teach us a lesson about the suffering. The metaphor is there so that the suffering might rise above.

In case the four paragraph preamble to a point didn't tip you off, I'm not entirely sure how to approach this one. It's exceptional in a way that makes me nervous about dissection or critique. I'm used to writing silly things about reversed polarity and Cardassians and what not. Racial injustice is not something I feel qualified to discuss. I can't quote you specifics on the struggles of African American pulp fiction writers from the 1950s, nor can I offer a personal anecdote in any way relevant to the matter at hand. To do the latter would be obscene; not because the episode is some holy, sacred object (I liked it a lot, and it's grown on me since watching it, but it's kind of crazy and clunky at times, sort of like this review), but because I, in my limited experience, cannot speak to Benny's plight. When it's Sisko, or Bashir, or Odo, or Kira—I get that. That's easy. But actual systematic prejudice? I've had the biological and geographical luck to have been spared such a thing, and while I can empathize (great art makes empathy easier), I'm also reluctant to speak with any kind of authority on the subject.

Part of the value, then, of an hour like this (and yeah, it's not all set in the past, and the way the script and Avery Brooks' direction chooses to integrate the "reality" of the show with the "reality" of Benny's world is quite striking) is by presenting a different perspective from the sort that usually gets center stage in popular entertainment. It's true that Brooks is the first black lead of a *Trek* series, and it's true that *Deep Space Nine* (much to its credit) has never tried to downplay or ignore this. Yet *DS9* takes place in a comparatively utopian future. It's a more pessimistic show than *TNG*, but that pessimism doesn't take away from the fact that the Federation—the dominant "good guy" force—doesn't discriminate based on race or, one would hope, gender or sexual preference. To the audience, Sisko's blackness is an important step forward for the franchise, indicating a broader acceptance of non-white protagonists. In the context of the show, though, it's just another part of who he is; it matters, but it doesn't define him in the eyes of those around him. There's something refreshing about that, of the fantasy of a future which has so many different kinds of people (human and otherwise) that you're too busy trying to keep up to hate any of them. (Unless you're a Cardassian. Things are pretty easy then.)

At the same time, though, there's a lie in that fantasy, the same lie people tell themselves when they talk about "post-racial" America. The future is a lovely place to imagine, but we don't live there, and in the present, things are more complicated, more frustrating, and quite often more awful. Today, diversity in television and film remains a pressing issue, because by clinging to narrow definitions of "protagonist"—by insisting that audiences are ready to see onl certain genders or ethnicities in certain roles—we are robbed of the width and breadth of experience that fiction is supposed to provide. Worse, many of us are robbed of a voice in that fiction. So the simple fact that "Far Beyond The Stars" tells a black story with a black hero and his black girlfriend and their black friends means something. What happens to Benny has, like "The Outcast," resonance that goes beyond one person's pain, but no matter how deep or far you go, Benny is still standing at the heart of it. It's telling, and upsetting, to realize that it's still unusual to see even an hour of television which doesn't give us a white audience surrogate, that doesn't have some square-jawed Caucasian strolling into a situation, taking its measure, and saving the day. There are white folks in "Far Beyond The Stars," and some of them are quite nice, but even the nicest of them is fundamentally ineffectual. They can apologize, they can

sympathize, they can even protest, but that's as far as it goes. Benny tries and he fails, and even when the metaphysics take over, they can't deny that simple fact. Anyone who's watched enough TV has seen a story about a black man or woman being told what they can and can't do, but for once, there's no outsider standing to the side, shaking his head sadly. There's just Benny and us.

That's wrenching to watch. Strip away the sci-fi elements, and this is a straightforward tale of prejudice, with barely enough meat on the bones to carry it through an entire hour. Benny wants to write stories about a black captain; his editor, Douglas Pabst (Rene Auberjonois, who looks older than I was expecting), refuses to publish those stories because he doesn't think the public is ready for them. They come up with a compromise—the stories will all turn out to be “dreams”—but the owner of the magazine pulps the issue, refusing to accept Benny's work. Benny loses his job and collapses. He isn't beaten to death (although his friend Jimmy, played by an amusingly unconvincing Cirroc Lofton, is shot and killed by the cops) or framed for a crime he didn't commit. He just loses a chance to do what was most important to him, for no better reason than bigoted stupidity. Brooks spends most of his time as Benny playing it quieter than we're used to seeing him. This is a man who keeps his head down, and then one day he raises it, and suffers for the effort. Benny's big monologue is half-crazed poetry, the sort of broken heart madness that Brooks is so good at. He risks absurdity, but it's earned. The hour manages its racism casually and oppressively, like getting the color of the paint on the walls right. Even Jimmy's death is just something that happens, with no surprise at all. When the hero finally breaks under the pressure, it snaps the scene into focus. These aren't just indignities. This is a constant battery of mental and physical abuse.

Brooks' performance dominates the episode, which is for the best; the rest of the cast turns in work that's varying degrees of successful. (Anyone wanting to get a clearer sense of everyone's relative abilities would do well to watch this; apart from Brooks, I think Auberjonois, Penny Johnson, and Armin Shimerman come out the best). But even in the worst performances, there's enough of a sense of the actor, and of the character we're used to seeing them play, that it works. As for the metaphysics, well, it has its moments. Sisko's transition from being stressed over his job and worried about the future to seeing visions of Benny and his world is defiantly odd, refusing to offer a simple, easy explanation for what's happening. It's not just a hallucination; Bashir determines Sisko's neural patterns are spiking or whatever, much the same way they were spiking or whatever back when Sisko was getting visions from the Prophets. You could say, then, that this is the underlying truth of the entire series—it's all just Benny's fantasy—and I won't say you're wrong. But I'm not sure Benny's world is ever solid enough to make that qualification mean anything. What we see is defined enough to make this episode work, but it doesn't have the history or the breadth of the series as a whole to make the “It's all in a writer's head!” argument more than just a fun thing to speculate on in comment threads.

In terms of the character doubling, some choices are obvious: Dukat and Weyoun as asshole cops isn't a huge surprise, and even though Cassie doesn't have the same ambitions Kassy does (for understandable reasons), her relationship with Benny is as strong as Kassy's is with Sisko. Other connections are subtler, like, say, O'Brien turned into the Isaac Asimov stand-in Albert Macklin, who

loves machines much like an engineer would. Jimmy isn't exactly like Jake (Lofton's performance is endearingly forced, and he is, I think, the only actor to ever say the n-word on a Trek show), but his relationship with Benny is of the sort where you can imagine the writer trying to come up with something better for both of them, a situation in which the older man can impart some much needed knowledge to the younger. Seeing Odo as Pabst might be the coldest cut of all, as Pabst's placating approach to his work is similar to Odo's behavior during the Cardassian occupation: a shape-shifter who only chooses the form that will please his masters.

Yet Odo, our Odo, rose above this, and if you accept, for a moment, that Benny really did write everything we've been watching over the last six seasons, there's something beautiful in how he tried to find ways to turn ordinary people into heroes. The writing staff at the magazine became a brave crew with complicated histories and passions; more, they became a family, one in which Sisko is first among equals. Cassie got a ship and adventure. Willie Hawkins, the lady loving baseball player became a warrior (a somewhat humorless and stiff-necked warrior, but when a guy keeps hitting on your girl like that, you gotta take revenge where you can find it). The asshole cops get justice as villains who will, in the end, be defeated. And Benny? Benny gets a space station and a loving father and a loving son. He gets the respect of his peers and the voice of the gods.

A metaphor—a secret lesson, a code to slip past the guardians of culture—that can do some good. It can be necessary, and useful, and just. But a metaphor can also be all that you have left. It can be a way out. A way free. "Far Beyond The Stars" succeeds because it does have universal concerns: the desire for respect, to be free to aspire without constraint. But by refusing to cloak those concerns in pure symbol, by reminding us that these things do happen, are, in fact, still happening every day, the episode escapes the trap of message and commentary and creates something unique. Maybe somewhere, Benny Russell is dreaming. And maybe someday, he won't need those dreams.

Next week: We return to our regularly scheduled programming with a double shot of "One Little Ship" and "Honor Among Thieves."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "One Little Ship"/"Honor Among Thieves"[Zack Handlen](#)[11/21/13 10:00AM](#)**"One Little Ship" (season 6, episode 14; originally aired 2/18/1998)***In which Dax, Bashir, and O'Brien take a fantastic voyage...*

A show's genre qualifies our expectations of it. I wouldn't expect to see zombies wandering through the background of *Mad Men*, as awesome as that would be; conversely, I'd be shocked to find rich characterizations and thoughtful commentary about the shifting of cultural norms on *The Walking Dead*. (Zing!) Over time, a show develops a niche, creating expectations that define it even when set against other shows of a similar type. Those limits establish what stories the writers can tell, creating limits which in turn help to ground the reality of what we're watching. There is no actual rule that says a witch can't show up at the front door of Sterling, Cooper, Draper & Pryce at the start of next season, but it would be a terrible idea. It would break the reality of the show, and the fact that the show has no real fundamental reality makes that reality even more necessary to protect. This is delicate business, and television is littered with examples of showrunners overstepping invisible lines and threatening to knock everything over for good. (Ask a *Friday Night Lights* fan about Landry and season 2, but only if you have a few minutes.)

The fact that *DS9* is a science fiction show—and a semi-fantastical one at that—means that the writers have a lot of wiggle room before they'd be in any risk of going too far. Maybe if a vampire showed up (I'm on a Halloween kick today), without any accompanying pseudo-scientific explanation, that would break something. Who knows. I'll say this much, though: shrinking three major characters to the size of thumbtacks is about as close as I hope we'll ever get to zombies on the bridge. It's so silly that it threatens to become absurd in unintentional ways. Yet "One Little Ship" is charming, and fun, enough

to justify the risk. Maybe that's the only real guideline: the bigger the chance you take, the stranger or more potentially distracting the twist, the harder you have to work to earn it.

"Hard work" isn't the first phrase that pops to mind when it comes to describing this episode, which follows the adventures of a miniaturized Dax, Bashir, and O'Brien as they fight to save a regular-sized Defiant from the clutches of the Jem'Hadar; this story succeeds because it keeps things light. It's not a comedy, exactly, although there are funny bits. The situation is played straight, even as the characters throw jokes at each other to try and keep their spirits up. But it is fun, which is pretty much a requirement with such an inherently goofy idea. This is an adventure, pure and simple, with menacing bad guys and determined heroes, and there's no intense moral questions or dire tragedy to force us to take the premise more seriously than we should. If there was, the shots of a tiny Rubicon floating through the Defiant's engine room and various corridors would strain credulity to the breaking point. Because things are briskly paced and engaging, it's much easier to just enjoy the ride without questioning the particulars. The "hard work," then, comes in the polished, well constructed script by David Weddle and Bradley Thompson, and the surprisingly convincing effects work. The writers wisely keep the shrunken heroes inside the Rubicon for most of the running time, and it just looks—well, it looks kind of adorable. In a good way!

So, bottom line is, this is nifty bit of television, another highlight in a season which has so far been impressively full of such highlights. This wouldn't be *DS9*, though, if there weren't some subtleties to discuss. I mentioned a few weeks ago that I was missing some good old fashioned Bashir/O'Brien banter, and "One Little Ship" is full of the stuff; O'Brien's response to a crisis is to worry and work on the problem, while Bashir's response is to mock O'Brien's concerns, a dynamic which somehow doesn't make either character come off poorly. The highlight is their trip inside a computer system to do, well, it's very complicated and technical and involves them needing to release the bridge controls to the engine room so Sisko can take control of the ship, but all that really matters is that the set looks cool, and it gives the two chums a chance to work together, which they do quite well. Dax, meanwhile, is an excellent leader of the trio, and while it makes sense that she'd be in charge, given her rank and her experience, it's still nice to see a woman in command without anyone even considering questioning her role. (It never even occurred to me to notice this until just now, and I'm still probably over-stressing it, so good job, show.)

Sisko, Kira, Nog, and Worf's efforts to defeat the Jem'Hadar are solid; I especially like how Nog's become an important member of the team, even coming close to bonding with Worf. Or at least helping to cover for Worf when the Dax and the others try to embarrass him, which is about the same. But the really interesting details in this episode come from what we learn about a new development with the Jem'Hadar soldiers. Because of Sisko's successful return to Deep Space Nine (and the Prophets helpful "Oh, we'll just take care of that for you" gesture), the Vorta have had to breed a new group of Jem'Hadar on this side of the wormhole. This new group are called "alphas," and there is definite tension between the non-alphas and their apparent replacements. This tension is demonstrated by the strained relations between the group's First, Kuduk'Etan (Scott Thompson Baker), an arrogant alpha, and the Second, Ixtana'Rax (Fritz Sperberg), an old schooler with more experience in the field. Throughout the hour, Ixtana'Rax repeatedly gives Kuduk'Etan the sort of advice that would've made this a very short (and sad, for our heroes) episode, and the First angrily tells him to hold his tongue.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Jem'Hadar is how their innate subservience to the Founders and their aggressive natures work against each other in unexpected ways. From what we see here, there's little doubt that Kuduk'Etan and his fellow alphas are as driven and focused on victory for their leaders as earlier iterations of the Jem'Hadar are, but that drive manifests itself as a reckless self-confidence, and a need to prove themselves unique (and thus better, and more honorable, than their predecessors) leads to potentially disastrous blindness. Even a seemingly perfect system, one which relies on servants genetically engineered to do one's bidding, has its risks. In creating the Jem'Hadar, the Changelings sought to build the perfect warrior: fanatical, physically gifted, and stripped of all excess concerns. But sentient life will always find ways to justify its existence, and if the only avenue for that justification is a deeper commitment to the honor of battle, and a pride in service, you're creating a race of super powerful killers who live perpetually on the borders of madness. The white keeps them in check (although note how Kuduk'Etan subverts the usual ritual; he distributes the drug amongst his own, and assures them there's no need to recite the usual oaths, because their deeds are what defines them), but the balance won't last forever.

This is all very under the radar for right now, though; the writers want us to be aware that shifts are happening, and I'm sure those shifts will eventually have some sort of pay-off down the line, but "One Little Ship" resolves without much in the way of moral complexity, and is all the better for it. The Rubicon helps to save the day, everyone's restored to their normal size, Worf makes a funny (a really good one, too), and Odo and Quark team up to mock O'Brien and Bashir. It's hard to ask for much more than that.

Stray observations:

- The miniaturization is accomplished via some space anomaly thingie which is best not questioned too closely; I feel like, if it were possible to shrink someone down very small on a regular basis, this would raise questions I have no interest in the show trying to answer.
- That final scene really is terrific. Both Worf's joke (he reads the first line of an intentionally terrible poem to Dax) and Odo and Quark's gag (Odo suggests that Bashir and O'Brien have come back shorter from their experience, and Quark concurs) are brief, but warm and necessary glimpses of everyone going about their usual business.
- "Don't worry, I have a light touch." -Dax "Not according to Worf." -Bashir. Hey-o!
- "And people say you don't have a sense of humor." -Quark

"Honor Among Thieves" (season 6, episode 15; originally aired 2/18/1998)

In which O'Brien can't fuggaaboutit...

Of all the things I was expecting from a mid-season episode of *DS9*, a *Donnie Brasco* riff was not one of them. In fact, I was so not expecting it that it took me maybe half of "Honor Among Thieves" to realize what was going on. In my defense, the homage (we will be polite and label it as such) doesn't really get cooking until O'Brien visits Liam Bilby's apartment, and realizes what a friendly sad sack the old bastard really is. Up until then, the story is a typical enough "let's go undercover with the mob!" plot, as O'Brien uses his technological know-how to ingratiate himself with a trio of low rent crooks who run jobs for the Orion Syndicate. But once we get a better sense of who Bilby (Nick Tate) is, the reference point becomes impossible to ignore. Colm Meaney may not be the world's most convincing stand-in for Johnny Depp, but he fits quite nicely into the role of a good guy pretending to be a bad one to catch some real villains. And Nick Tate may not be Pacino, but he does a great job as a decent

guy who loves his family a whole lot, and has a pet cat named Chester, and oh yeah is also a crook who's willing to kill people.

I don't know as *DS9* needed a mob episode. The show is always willing to poke around different cultures and try and figure out what makes them tick, but a cartoonishly evil criminal organization doesn't strike me as a topic that's ripe for study. Halfway through the episode, a Vorta shows up in the company of Bilby's Orion contact, and there's an effort made to tie this all back into the season's main plot; Bilby gets a mission to murder the local Klingon Ambassador, but to do it in such a way as to frame Gowron for the crime, thus creating strife in the Empire, strife that will help the Dominion in its war against the Federation.

That's a clever way to pull everything together, and it's a good example of how the show's attention to serialization pays off even in minor episodes. The Vorta's appearance demonstrates just how far the Dominion War has spread, and keeping the season's threat present even in a story that isn't necessarily dedicated to moving the big picture forward. But it doesn't really explain why O'Brien has been sucked into this situation in the first place. His Starfleet contact, Chadwick (Michael Harney, who I think is going for low-key but mostly ends up being very, very boring), tells him how multiple other undercover operative have been killed trying to get inside the Syndicate, which is a necessary gesture to establish the stakes, but also serves to underline how inappropriate O'Brien is for this kind of work. He was a soldier, and I can imagine him doing reconnaissance, but out of all the people available, is the Chief Engineer of what might be the most important space station in the universe really the best guy to call when you want to get a bead on a bunch of crooks? He succeeds, because that's what O'Briens do best, but it seems like a misplaced application of a very important tool.

Maybe "Honor Among Thieves" is another entry in the Hard Times For O'Brien signature series, although it doesn't really come off that way. He's deeply troubled by the end of the episode, and for good reason, but there's little of the physical and mental torment he's endured in the past. The crux of his dilemma here is that the more he gets to know Bilby, the more he gets to like him. And that inevitably leads to a horrified moment when he realizes that in order to do his job, he's going to have to send his friend to his death. Not just betray him, not just doom him to spending the remainder of his years in a Federation prison; actually set him up to be killed. And since it's Klingons who will do the killing, it's not going to be an easy death. That is a rough spot to be in, and to its credit, the episode treats it seriously, even if it never really rises above the mafia-in-alien-clothing trappings. The last scene between Bashir and O'Brien suggests that this incident will haunt the Chief for a long time. (It also inadvertently reminds us how long it's been since we've seen Keiko on the show.)

This conceit wouldn't work if we, too, didn't fall a bit for Bilby, much like Donnie Brasco wouldn't be nearly as effective if it didn't feature one of Al Pacino's best performances in years. Nick Tate does a fine job, and while Rene Echevarria's script tips its hand a little too much in making him sympathetic, the actor makes that sympathy feel earned regardless. It's a gratifyingly complex view of criminality from a show that tends to make bad guys of this sort into either comic relief or heavy-handed thugs. Bilby is neither. Admittedly, no one around him is offered the same respect; Krole (Carlos Carrasco) and Flith (John Chandler) are pretty much your standard henchmen, all cowardly cringing and ineptitude. The impression that the three criminals are getting near the ends of their various ropes is obvious, and that makes them a little more interesting, but for the most part, Bilby's the show. His constant exhortations about the importance of family make him more than just a bully with a gun, and

the clear shine he takes to O'Brien suggest a desperately lonely man who wishes he had someone to talk to who had more on his mind than cadging free meals from a computer system. As character studies go, it's not bad, and Tate and Meaney work well together.

It's just, once you spot the movie connection, it's distracting how indebted Rene Echevarria and Philip Kim are to their unacknowledged (at least officially) source. Bilby takes a shine to O'Brien because he's lonely, and also because he needs someone competent in his organization to impress the bosses with; he's down on his luck and could use a boost. He even buys O'Brien clothes to wear. In the moment that basically dooms him, Bilby vouches for his new protege to the boss, Raimus (Joseph Culp), which means that if O'Brien fails live up to the Syndicate's high standards, both men will be punished. All of this is familiar to anyone who's seen *Donnie Brasco*, and while the arc is a familiar one to undercover stories, the specifics are needlessly, well, specific.

Or maybe it's just this isn't really a story that suits the show all that well. O'Brien is the nominal protagonist, but O'Brien is a quiet man, and his time undercover isn't long enough for him to get a really good case of angst going. Which means that Bilby dominates the episode, and as solid as Tate is, the character's journey isn't really compelling enough to justify the spotlight for this long. "Honor Among Thieves" is far from a bad episode, and the fact that it follows through in the end, and Bilby does die, means its moving in its small way. But even with the Vorta's presence, events are so detached from the parts of the show we really care about that the whole thing comes off like an odd, unnecessary detour. When it comes to fiction, steal if you need to; but if you steal, you better make sure to make what you take your own.

Stray observations:

- At one point, Bilby gets O'Brien a prostitute. The lady doesn't have a single line and is, as far as I could tell, the only woman to appear in the hour.

Next week: Happy Thanksgiving! We'll be back December 5th with "Change Of Heart" and "Wrongs Darker Than Death Or Night."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Change Of Heart”/“Wrongs Darker Than Death Or Night”[Zack Handlen](#)[12/05/13 10:00AM](#)**“Change Of Heart” (season 6, episode 16; originally aired 3/4/1998)***In which Worf has one...*

Here I was thinking I wouldn’t have to say anything else about Dworf (Wax?), and the writers decide to throw something like this at us. “Change Of Heart” works very, very hard to find the pathos buried inside Worf and Dax’s marriage, and the episode lives and dies on how much the audience has invested in that relationship. There’s a fun subplot with O’Brien and Bashir (that takes a hard left in an unsatisfying direction), and I suppose you could get worked up about whether or not Dax was going to survive (I actually was, for reasons I’ll get into in the stray observations), but the meat of the story is in Worf and Dax’s mission to meet with a Cardassian spy. It’s in how the rendezvous turns into a rescue, how that rescue gets derailed, and how Worf finally decides between his honor and his heart. If none of this holds your interest, then the hour will be a dud, Bashir and O’Brien notwithstanding.

It worked for me, which came as something of a surprise. I am, at heart, a romantic; stories about characters willing to sacrifice everything to protect their partners (romantic partners, I mean; I’m not going all weepy if Dewey takes a bullet for Cheatum at Howe, Dewey, Cheatum & Steel) always hit me harder than I’d like to admit. I’ve talked at length before about why it’s difficult to get behind Worf and Dax as a couple, but it mostly comes down to a matter of tone. When the balance is off, Worf turns into a stern authoritarian whose adherence to discipline turns his relationship with the fun-loving Dax into something uncomfortably close to strict-dad/rebellious-daughter. When the balance is right, the two characters should bring out the best in each other. Dax can encourage Worf’s latent humor and passion, while Worf can ground Dax’s life and offer unflinching support. The biggest issue is that the

writers have rarely managed to achieve this. It's far too easy to go back to the old well of Worf bitching about tradition, and Dax wanting to have fun but not being able to.

Thankfully "Change Of Heart" avoids this trap, and the scenes between Dax and Worf are some of the best the show has ever done. The cold open has Worf and O'Brien observing a Tongo game in progress; Dax is down by a considerable amount of latinum, but Worf, despite not really understanding the game, is convinced that his wife is about to pull a big upset. He's so convinced, in fact, that he bets with O'Brien on the outcome, a bet that he then loses. It's a cute bit, and doesn't have much to do with the plot, outside of establishing just how fond Worf is of his wife—but considering where the story is about to go, that's pretty damn important. Just as important, the exchange between O'Brien and Worf gives the latter a chance to actually be friendly and likable, instead of just growling at people. This is a Worf I can imagine hanging out with, and it's also a Worf I can imagine a sane person dating. While the Klingon has thankfully been given greater range and agency on *DS9* than he had on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, he's still too often stuck in the imagination-free curmudgeon role, and any chance to see him break out of that is a good thing.

The rehabilitation continues for most of the episode, as Ron Moore's script repeatedly finds opportunities to engage with the couple, showing them at home and at work as a functioning, and frequently charming, pair. We see Worf and Dax hanging out in their apartments, him praying to a shrine, her respecting his beliefs and then climbing into bed naked. (So I guess they don't have to beat the shit out of each other every time they have sex.) We see them chatting about their honeymoon plans, and while this conversation reverts back to their familiar roles—Worf wants traditional Klingon suffering, Dax wants to be "pampered"—it's still light and pleasant. In just a handful of scenes, Moore and the actors manage to make this relationship not just a plot development, but an actual viable romantic connection, a pairing that has more value than a simple story engine.

These sequences work to make the second half of the episode, after Dax has been injured and Worf is struggling to decide what to do next, more powerful. But stuff like this should be a regular part of the series, the sort of occasional character moment that gives relationships like O'Brien and Bashir, or Odo and Quark, such deep reservoirs of history and charm. And really, this is the sort of thing we should've been seeing even before Worf and Dax hooked up. The writers did their best to justify the attraction, but it was too often an abstract concept, a conceit that it was difficult to feel much of anything about. A storyline of Worf and Dax exchanging quips with a will they/won't they vibe could've been great, and while the climax of this episode hinges on Worf making different choices as a married man, it could also have worked as the moment when Worf discovered the depth of his passion for this non-Klingon female. The bottom line is, this romance needs more romance, and "Change Of Heart" manages that well.

The Bashir and O'Brien subplot is less effective, although far from a disaster. O'Brien's sudden determination to beat Quark at Tongo despite having no real idea how the game is played fits him well, and Bashir's knack for the game is a good use of his magical genetically engineered powers. These two are made for lightly comedic plotlines, and for the most part, it's a nice change of pace from the rest of the episode. The weirdness comes in when Quark decides to mindfuck Bashir over his old crush on Dax. Now, I can see making an argument that this is a realistic conversation, and as someone who has had his share of crushes in the past, I can accept that. Plus, while it's all a con, the more serious tone of the conversation fits the more serious tone of the back half of the hour. My

objection is more that I was under the impression that Bashir had moved on from Dax, and to bring his crush back up here twists their friendship in a way I'm not a huge fan of. But then, this is all coming from Quark, who is clearly manipulating the good doctor, so maybe my negative reaction was just me reading things incorrectly.

A more concrete objection comes from the fact that Worf and Dax were assigned this mission (with no one else!) in the first place. The dramatic crux of the story comes when Worf decides to choose saving Jadzia's life over making the meeting with the Cardassian spy. The spy, who claimed to have important information on the number and location of Founders in the Alpha Quadrant, was killed by his own people after Worf failed to make contact, and Starfleet is understandably upset by Worf's commitment to love. Sisko tells him as part of his punishment that he and Dax will never work alone together again, and the only sensible reaction is to wonder why this wasn't policy in the first place. Hell, Sisko even says that if he and Jennifer were in Worf and Dax's position, he would've made the same call.

So why isn't it standard policy not to allow married couples to team up on dangerous assignments? Generally speaking, I'm willing to hand wave the oddness of children on starships and families going off to war together, but a story like this just underlines the weirdness of Starfleet's half-in, half-out approach to being a militarized institution. Worf isn't to blame here. He was put in a position where he was forced to make an impossible choice, and had he accepted his orders and left his wife to die, it would've ruined his efficacy as a commander. It's just an idiotic policy, and while I normally try not nitpick this sort of thing (and I also am mostly willing to forgive it because I liked the episode), stories like this make certain false assumptions impossible to ignore. Worf isn't to blame for this clusterfuck. Idiot bureaucracy is. I'm just glad we didn't have to lose two good characters to learn that.

Stray observations:

- I suppose I should say something about Worf's choice here, so: I liked it. I think it was well-handled, and didn't cheat. And I agree with Sisko.
- Kind of surprised that the Tongo plot didn't end with a reveal that Quark had been cheating all along.
- Man, that Cardassian spy was a dick. I don't care if he did have information that could've potentially saved millions of lives. I'm glad he died.
- SPOILER: Okay, the reason I was worried Jadzia would die is that I already know she does; I've seen at least one episode from the final season that deals with her death, and Dax's replacement host. I just wasn't sure if the death happened off-screen or not, and given how poorly Jadzia was doing by the end, there seemed like a good chance that this was going to be her swan song.

“Wrongs Darker Than Death Or Night” (season 6, episode 17; originally aired 4/1/1998)

In which Kira meets her mother...

We're all compromised. Some of us more than others. Here I sit in a comfortable room, in a comfortable house, with two jobs, a lot of high tech toys, and the confidence that I know where my next meal is coming from; plenty of people don't have that, and there are multiple ways I could be trying to help, and sometimes I do. Mostly I don't, though. Mostly I ignore the charity drives and the e-mails and the twinges of conscience, because if I didn't, they would take over my life, and I'm selfish.

I want my life for myself. While I don't know you, or your struggles, I can assume that, if you're reading this, you've probably benefited at least a little from the suffering of others. Doesn't mean you chose it, doesn't mean you hurt anyone directly. But we live off the backs of the less fortunate, and no amount of atonement can alter this fact. The best you can do is find your level of necessary appeasement, and hope that's enough to sleep at night.

Kira, though? Kira has spent her whole life with the firm conviction that her morals are beyond reproach. She is passionate, dedicated, and whole in a way that makes her, at times, difficult to like, the sort of person who's constantly telling people about her time with the Peace Corp; not because she's bragging, but because she thinks the value of the organization is so self-evident that simply by discussing it, she'll win more converts. Kira is a believer to the core, but she's not really arrogant about it. She's earned her beliefs, and her scars, and she remains the rare example of a fictional revolutionary whose enthusiasm never makes her tiresome. Six seasons in, and I still want Kira to keep winning. The show has thrown most everything it can at her (but not, to the best of my recollection, rape, so good job everyone), and she comes out swinging every time.

"Wrongs Darker" doesn't break this trend, but it does present a complex situation, one that pushes at the limits of Kira's moral compass. The downside to her passion is a certain tendency towards binary thinking. Something is evil or it isn't; there is no real gray area. This is an understandable tack to take when one is fighting a revolution to free one's people from enslavement and genocide. Such circumstances don't really allow the time it takes to parse out situational ethics, and even if they did, the sheer effort of risking your life day in and day out to fight a seemingly undefeatable foe means you can't waste a lot of emotional energy on internal debate. But now that the Cardassians have left, and Bajor is free once again, life has gotten back to be tricky in different ways. This episode has her traveling back in time to find out exactly what relationship her mother (Kira Meru, played by Leslie Hope, who also played Jack Bauer's wife in the first season of 24) had with Gul Dukat. In a sense, she's going back to the old days, when life was simpler: rebels versus the evil empire. But nothing's simple, really. Not the way we want it to be.

Okay, so let's get the Orb of Time stuff out of the way first: It's a very odd idea, and while the show has used it in the past, the fact that Kira can basically just take a vacation from her job and pull a Marty McFly is on the silly side. Sure, she had to get Sisko's permission before she goes, and she explains that she'll only get what she wants if the Prophets wish it, which helpfully cuts off any possibility that the Orb of Time does this sort of thing on the regular. But, again—silly. And what are the rules, exactly? Kira uses the Orb, wakes up in her own past, even meets herself (briefly), and then follows her mother around for a while, briefly becoming a "comfort woman" for the Cardassians on Terek Nor. When she finds the truth about Mom (or a truth, anyway), she starts plotting revenge, even planting a bomb inside Meru and Dukat's quarters. How does this work, exactly? Is she really in the past, or in a vision of it? If her efforts had been successful, could she have killed Dukat a full decade or more before the series even began?

I don't know. And in all honestly, while I have fun wondering about it, I don't think it matters that much. In some episodes of *DS9*, time travel, and the restrictions it places on our heroes, is an important element in the plot. Here, it's simply a device to allow Kira to face off against her mom directly even though her mom has been dead for some time. I'm a little irked at how casual this has become—we don't need time travel to become an every-other-week type event on the show, thanks.

But in the context of “Wrongs Darker,” it’s basically fine. The only real complaint is that questions about causality (seriously, what would’ve happened if Kira had decided to blow up her mom and Dukat? And why was she so cavalier about the whole thing?) distract from the more important issues at hand.

That issue being Kira Meru, her relationship with the Gul, and what the relationship means to her daughter. This show has always been good at offering difficult scenarios and then refusing to give us easy answers, and “Wrongs Darker” does not disappoint in this regard. The story kicks off when Kira gets a message from Dukat on her mother’s birthday. Dukat claims to have been in a relationship with Meru for years, and provides personal information that seems to corroborate his assertion. This upsets the hell out of Kira, for obvious reasons, and she travels to the past determined to prove Dukat wrong.

But of course he isn’t wrong, and that’s where things get tricky. We already knew that Bajorans under the occupation were in a miserable state, and the episode quickly confirms this: Kira’s family, along with the other families in their camp, are slowly starving to death. When a Bajoran collaborator comes to the camp looking to select some of the ladies as prostitutes for the Cardassian garrison, Meru goes along. She doesn’t really have a choice; none of them do. But while it’s entirely justifiable that the women would try and make the best of an awful situation, Meru seems to take things a step further. Dukat takes a special liking to her, and she accepts his advances. More, she responds to them, and this enrages Kira. Her worst fears are confirmed: her mother slept with the enemy, and enjoyed it, betraying everything Kira stands for.

Except it’s not that simple, as Meru tries to explain. In a way, Kira is approaching her own past from a position of privilege. From her perspective, the fight against the Cardassians was a noble battle that ended in victory. She had a choice, and her choice was the right one, so she can feel pretty solid about everything. Meru’s situation was more complicated. She had a family to protect, which meant that it would’ve been more difficult for her to get involved in the revolution. And maybe she didn’t have a particularly revolutionary frame of mind. From what we see of her in this episode, Kira’s mother was a decent, deeply sad woman who was trying to make the best of an impossible situation. She doesn’t have Kira’s fire, or her commitment. She’s just trying to survive in a miserable, ugly world. Going along with Dukat means that her family is protected and cared for; it means that they have a future (which means that Kira herself will get to grow up to do all those bold things she’s so good at doing). The pleasure she gets from Dukat’s gifts, and whatever she feels for the Cardassian himself—well, how can you blame her?

Kira can, of course, because at her worst, Kira is very good at blaming anyone who fails to live up to her standards. Although really, it’s understandable in this instance, since this is her mother; the mother who Kira thought died when she was a little girl. It’s not hard to imagine Kira spending her whole life building up a woman she never met, and to find out that not only are your assumptions wrong, but that this person you’ve loved your whole life without ever knowing is actually representative of everything you despise, has to be hard. Time travel logic aside, Kira’s decision to blow up Meru and Dukat make sense. It’s not a good decision, exactly, and it’s not one the episode necessarily agrees with, but it’s what she would do; just as her impulsive decision to save Meru and Dukat at the last moment makes sense. This is a sign of good drama: that a character can behave in

ways that we ourselves wouldn't necessarily subscribe to, but that that behavior still fits in with established patterns.

In the end, Kira doesn't forgive her mother for her weakness; that's a bold choice, because the script (by Ira Steven Behr and Hans Beimler) does what it can to make sure we feel some sympathy towards the lady. Kira tells Sisko she decided not to blow up Mom because, well, Moms is Moms, so to speak. It's a nice sentiment, but I'm not sure it's enough. Maybe that's because admitting what she was really feeling—that her hatred of collaborators might not be as perfectly justified as she'd like—was too painful to admit. We're all compromised. Even her.

Stray observations:

- So all of Dukat's gross attempts to hit on Kira in the past are now a hundred times grosser.
- "You want to travel back in time to see if Dukat and your mother were lovers." —Sisko (I don't know why I recorded this quote; I think the straightforward statement of a ludicrous premise amused me.)
- The last real scene we get with Meru, she's receiving a message from her husband, who tearfully thanks her for all she's done for the family. It's nifty how the episode manages to make both sides of Meru's situation true: she's doing what's best for the people she loves, and she's enjoying the benefits herself. The hell of the occupation is that it forces people into situations where they have to compromise themselves to find any happiness at all.

Next week: We hold an "Inquisition" and ponder "In The Pale Moonlight."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Inquisition”[Zack Handlen](#)[12/12/13 10:00AM](#)**“Inquisition” (season 6, episode 18; originally aired 4/8/1998)***In which we just have a few questions...*

Look, we’re all friends here, right? Of course we are—there’s no need to reply, I already know what you’ll say. And because we’re such good friends, and because we both care about justice, decency, and apple pie, we can be honest with each other. Things aren’t going well. There are threats coming at us from all sides, monstrous enemies with the power to wipe out our way of live if our resolve falters even for an instant. We are strong fighters and determined strategists, but this war never seems to end, and we are capable of mistakes. Worst of all is the possibility that some few of us might be working for the enemy. I know. I know! It’s a horrifying thought. But the enemy is cunning, even seductive; they are capable of shrouding themselves under cover of friendship, and even infiltrating our highest ranks. We must be ever vigilant. Ever watchful. Also, completely random here, but what have you been up to lately? You know, in general. Oh, no reason. I just notice you’re not saying much. And that makes me... curious.

Maybe the most shocking aspect of “Inquisition” is that it’s not very shocking at all. Strip away the science fiction elements and the big twist, and the fundamental story is so distressingly familiar as to be practically banal. A man with a past which happens to make him an easy target for suspicious minds (Bashir’s time in the Dominion prison camp, plus his genetically engineered brain, set him apart; there’s also his skin color, which, while technically irrelevant in the context of the show, raises some uncomfortable echoes in our present) is taken without his consent, questioned without understanding the charges, and tortured in order to determine the depth of his “innocence.” That the

torture is almost entirely psychological, and conveyed through the fun trickery of made-up technology, is a relief to be sure, but the story remains what it is. Apart from vague suspicions, there's no reason to accuse Bashir of committing a crime. Deputy Director Sloan (William Sadler, who is excellent) never gives any solid evidence proving his case; it's all innuendo, a mental fishing trip largely designed to see what, if anything, he can catch. Maybe that's the most disturbing part. After the charade is revealed, Sloan bears Bashir no hard feelings, and has no regret or guilt over his actions. He's not even bothered that Bashir is innocent. It's just a day's work, really.

But then, if we're looking for shocks, the discovery that Sloan is part of a mysterious security organization known as "Section 31," an organization which, while not officially condoned by the Federation, is not officially denied by it either—well, that's a stunner. The utopian future has been a key part of *Star Trek* since the original series, and while the ideal has been questioned and tweaked since the days that Kirk, Spock, and McCoy first debated ethics, it's never been entirely abandoned. The franchise has had its share of bullheaded officials, and for most of the run of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, it seemed like the only qualification necessary to be promoted to the rank of admiral was "being an arrogant asshole." You watch an episode like "The Offspring," in which a Starfleet officer tries to take away Data's newly created daughter, and it's hard not to draw certain conclusions about the organization, how its bureaucracy allows (and even encourages) stultified thinking, protecting the egos of its ranking members to a degree that they retain the illusion that their judgment is unquestionable. (See also "The Drumhead.") And Sisko has always had a somewhat uneasy relationship with the ruling body back on Earth.

Yet these developments, while frequently unsettling and, when well-handled, thrilling to watch, also suggested a certain base level of outlier status. Conflict arose between our heroes and the powers that be, but those conflicts were ultimately resolved, and even if the resolution didn't leave everyone satisfied, it at least felt that the fundamental systems themselves were not inherently corrupt. Any large governing body is bound to have flaws, because people have flaws, and while admitting that means giving up on Roddenberry's dream of perfection, well, it was a silly dream to begin with. (And it's not like Kirk didn't have to deal with his fair share of jerkwads.) The central principle—that the Federation was a powerful institution whose aims were solely for the benefit of all sentient life (okay, all sentient life that was a member, or might be a member in the future, but basically), and if the means they used to achieve those aims weren't always perfect, the decency remained. These were the good guys. Sometimes it was necessary to make them assholes so that our good guys had someone to shout at, but ultimately, everyone was on the same side.

The existence of Section 31 doesn't completely destroy this assumption. But it does put it on some very shaky ground. In our era of Homeland Security and seemingly omnipresent surveillance, the idea that a secret agency working inside the government to ferret out threats to national security might exist doesn't sound like a long shot. That's the present, though: the messy, irritating, cynical, non-fictional reality. *Star Trek* is supposed to be above that sort of thing. It represents an ideal we strive for, and its institutions should, one would assume, reflect that ideal. By creating Section 31, the writers of *DS9* have decided to muddy the water even further than they have in the past, and while right now, the organization is more of a threat than anything specific, it casts a shadow over everything. As a member of Starfleet, Bashir has always considered himself to be on the right side, the side that protects truth and justice and due process, the side that would never ever kidnap people in the middle of the night to try and break their brains open through trickery and deceit. But now that

belief has been tested. And while no serious physical damage is done—while Bashir is able to use the standard “Wait, a previous event established a condition which pokes a hole in your seemingly perfect scenario!” out that so many Trek episodes have used in the past to save himself—the doubts remain. Because what if O’Brien hadn’t injured himself without Sloan’s knowledge? What if the simulation had been perfect? What if Sloan had decided to dig deeper?

The grimmest implications of “Inquisition” are held off until the end of the episode. Until then, the plot follows Dr. Bashir through the interview process, charting each step of Sloan’s attempts to first win his trust, then unnerve him, then put him on his guard, and then make him doubt himself. Over the course of the interrogations, Sloan reveals himself to be very, very good at his job; Sadler is a reliable heavy, conveying an almost palpable contempt for his adversaries even when he’s pretending to be their friend, and the script by Bradley Thompson and David Weddle makes great use of Bashir’s past, throwing seemingly unconnected incidents back into the doctor’s face and treating them as some great pattern which leads inevitably to betrayal. And when it comes time for Sloan to go on the attack, he twists the accusation in a way that allows Bashir to confess a sin without accepting any guilt for it, a brilliant bait and switch that seems to offer sympathy even as it tightens the noose.

“Engramatic dissociation” is an obscure phrase, but the meaning is simple. What if the Dominion broke Bashir so thoroughly that he doesn’t even remember being broken? He can be a double agent without needing to give up his concept of himself as a good Federation officer. It’s not his fault. It’s just his brain.

This is a clear tactic on Sloan’s part. Once he can get Bashir to admit that culpability is possible, he has a foothold, and can press further, uncovering whatever secrets remain hidden. (I don’t know if Sloan honestly believes Bashir has divided mind; I don’t think he cares very much either way. Morality rarely enters into the equation for people like Sloan.) But Bashir stubbornly refuses to take the bait, and it’s a measure of the effectiveness of the episode that even I found myself doubting him. In retrospect, it wouldn’t have made a lot of sense for Bashir to actually be working for the Dominion, even if it did turn out to be inadvertent. For one, we’ve already done the “Bashir is evil!” plot, and even if this time it would be the actual real Bashir committing the crimes, that’s still needlessly redundant writing. For another, it wouldn’t make much sense to introduce a creepy, invasive security force which also happens to be completely right. Dramatically speaking, that would be one hell of a bummer, and not in a particularly interesting or exciting way. Still, I couldn’t help wondering, right up until the moment when Weyoun beams Bashir aboard his ship.

It’s not really Weyoun, but the episode does such a good job of disorienting the viewer nearly as much as poor Bashir that for a few minutes, it seems like all of this might actually be happening. And a few minutes is all it takes. There’s something comforting in that last twist, the discovery that Bashir has been on a holodeck, and that much of what we’ve seen (all of it?) has been constructed specifically to break him. Because at least a holodeck gives us some distance from what’s happening. It’s a construct, and after all that uncomfortable dialogue and questioning, after seeing even Sisko begin to doubt Bashir’s honesty, a fun, clever construct that gives Bashir a chance to outsmart his captors puts us firmly back in the land of fiction. The final scene has Bashir retelling his adventures to Sisko, Kira, and Odo, and none of them question the need to learn more about Section 31; there’s a clear sense that the good guys aren’t bowing out in the face of such malevolence, institutional though it may be, and that’s a relief. Because in real life, there are no clever tricks, no easy to exploit mistakes, no way to

turn the tables and escape. Sloan is wearing a leather uniform in the end. I imagine the blood washes right off.

Stray observations:

- Michael Dorn directed this episode. Good job, Michael Dorn.
- Okay, how long was Bashir on that holodeck? From the moment he wakes up for his conference? Was it when he was beamed out of the cell? Somewhere in between? (I suspect there's an obvious answer to this, but I'm going to display my ignorance for all to see.)
- Sisko tells Bashir to join Section 31 the next time Sloan makes him an offer. I have mixed feelings about this. Further time spent on on this storyline might rob it of its power, but I really, really want to see Sadler again. (Also, Bashir as an actual spy could pay huge dividends.)

Next week: Muddy water turns black as we close out the year with "In The Pale Moonlight."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "In The Pale Moonlight"



[Zack Handlen](#)

[12/19/13 10:00AM](#)

(season 6, episode 19; originally aired 4/15/1998)

When I was 18 years old, my family took a vacation. I stayed home, because it was summer and because I had a job; I was trying to put away some money before I went to college in the fall. I'd just passed my driver's test, and my dad left me the truck, a big blue monster of a Ford that didn't turn so great and wheezed when you changed the gears.

One afternoon I was running low on cereal and toilet paper, so I took a trip to the grocery store. The parking lot was three-quarters full, but I found a space not too far from the entrance. It was narrow, but I was sure I could make it, and I'd never had any problems parking before. But I didn't make it. As I turned, there was a crunch and a popping sound, and I looked down just in time to see fragments of orange plastic flying out where the truck's bumper had knocked out another car's tail light. A stranger's tail light.

I froze. In the 10 seconds before I made my next move, I had options, but all I knew was that I was a bad person, and that everything was ruined. So when my 10 seconds were up, I drove away. For the next two days, I was convinced that the cops were going to find me, that someone had seen me, that someone had written down my license plate number. But nothing happened. There wasn't even enough damage to the truck for my parents to notice when they finally came home.

I love stories, and I love them because they have reasons, and consequences, cause and effect. They have meaning. But this story made no sense. I wasn't one of the good guys anymore, but it didn't matter. No one cared. I got over it.

There's nothing in my life comparable to Sisko's actions in "In The Pale Moonlight." The episode goes to great lengths to establish the ongoing cost of the Dominion War, the captain's personal sense of responsibility, and the frustrated rage that drives him. He does what he does because he tells himself there are no other choices he can make, and life keeps finding reasons that seem to confirm this. There's no real accident here, and certainly nothing as silly as the anecdote I just described; Sisko's course might have saved the entire Federation. My cowardice just screwed somebody out of a tail light. But for me, what matters most about "In The Pale Moonlight" is what happens at the very end: nothing. Oh, some ambiguity, a little uncomfortableness. It's possible the death of the Romulan ambassador might someday land on the captain's doorstep, and there could very well be consequences. But for right now, he gets away with it. He drives off, and if he has a hard time sleeping, he'll get over it.

Star Trek is built on the vision of an ideal future; a tomorrow in which so many of the wants and hatreds that drive us today have been put aside. No money, no starvation, and if politics still seem as sniping and childish as ever, well, maybe there are folks who prefer it that way. The fundamental assumption is that problems can be solved. That with enough technology, enough goodwill and time, eventually humanity will work through its differences and grow the fuck up. Sure, there will still be the occasional criminal or malcontent, and sure, contact with other species can bring with it a whole host of new problems. But the fundamental optimism remains. With patience, the stalwart and true heroes of the world can save the day by sticking to their principles. It's a nice idea.

In the years since Gene Roddenberry's "*Wagon Train* to the stars" first debuted, that idea has been poked and prodded by the *Star Trek* franchise, but it's never been entirely discarded. Jean-Luc Picard had some dark moments on the *Enterprise*, but there was never any question about his moral fortitude; the worst thing that happened to him—being captured and assimilated by the Borg—was something that was done *to* him, not a personal failing or momentary lapse. The integrity of Picard, and of all his crew, was one of the hallmarks that defined *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. At the show's best, these were good people doing noble work. They struggled from time to time, and they weren't perfect, but they didn't compromise themselves.

The same can't really be said for *Deep Space Nine*. It's a show built on compromise, and most of its cast have experienced this first hand. The events of "Moonlight," the slow sickening build of bad choice stacked atop bad choice, are simply the natural evolution of a principle that has been with us from the beginning. Life is not neat. It is messy and strained and frequently uncomfortable, and staying clean isn't always an option. The shock here isn't that Sisko is capable of following a course of action that ends in murder. The shock is the realization that this isn't that shocking. It doesn't destroy our idea of Sisko, it doesn't break any established rules, and it doesn't shake the foundations of the series. All it does is twist things. Slightly. The good guys are still going to win, and the evil Dominion will be cast aside (or maybe there will be negotiations, I don't know), and all it cost was, well. Not that much, right? A few lives, and a blotch on a good man's soul. That's a comparatively small price to pay.

Putting aside thematic concerns for a moment, "Moonlight"'s framing device, which has Sisko wrestling with his actions as he narrates what happened to his personal log, helps to establish this as being as much about character as it is about plot. Not that there's ever any danger of us losing sight of that plot. If I have a criticism of the episode, it's that it works a little too hard to make sure we understand exactly why Sisko does what he does, with Dax making comments like, "Boy, we definitely

need the some help now!” at just the right moment. These reminders are distracting and unnecessary, although it’s not hard to figure out why they were included. *DS9* has always been an accessible series; for all its moral ambiguity and technobabble, it rarely makes us struggle too hard to understand where its characters are coming from. Its genius is in using that accessibility to force its audience to confront uncomfortable truths. Another show might have gone to lengths to make sure neither side in the Dominion War was, strictly speaking, right; here, while it’s possible to sympathize with the Jem’Hadar, and even the Founders, there’s no real question. But that doesn’t make what happens to Vreenak (the always terrifying Stephen McHattie) any easier to take.

“In The Pale Moonlight” shifts the status quo for the series’ biggest ongoing storyline, but Sisko’s musings, self-recrimination, and self-doubt are the heart of the story. The episode turns the entire Dominion War into an opportunity to consider what lengths a man might be willing to go to try and do the right thing—and how the “right thing” can cease to lose its meaning past a certain point. In that respect, the hour plays like a miniature film noir, full of big gambles and shady creeps; you can even, if you squint, see some of the antihero signifiers that would become so important to modern television drama. Sisko takes shortcuts, offers bribes, works with criminals, and keeps the truth from his friends, and he does it all with, as he himself notes, the best of intentions. He does it for a cause greater than himself, but the sins still stain.

The escalation is elegant, all small steps from here to here to here, and then suddenly you look back to where you came from and you can’t see home anymore. This isn’t the most fun I’ve had watching a *DS9* episode, but it *is* fun, and like those antihero shows, there’s a lot of excitement to be had in bending and breaking the rules. With Garak around, nothing ever gets too heavy or grim, except when you think about it; even Vreenak’s death doesn’t leave much of a mark. He was an interesting character, and he probably didn’t deserve to die, but it’s not like we’re going to miss him. Mostly this is just clever and well-paced and exciting, and each new setback adds to the suspense. Sisko’s plan, which seemed so simple (if basically impossible) keeps running into roadblocks, and each roadblock requires Sisko to lower himself just that much more. There’s plenty of entertainment value to be had in watching the captain negotiate a pay-off with Quark. Besides, Quark isn’t so bad, is he? And Garak, hey, Garak’s had his issues, but he’s such a charming, fascinating figure, he surely has everyone’s best interest at heart.

Here’s the thing: from a certain perspective, Garak does have everyone’s best interest at heart. At least, he has right people’s best interests. While the script (teleplay by Michael Taylor, from a story by Peter Allan Fields) may hit some notes too hard, it never overplays Sisko’s deepening sense of crisis, to the point where it’s entirely possible to watch the whole episode and think not much of importance has happened at all. It’s not as though Sisko murdered Vreenak himself; it’s not as though he records his log with blood dripping from his fingers.

Questions of right and wrong are often presented as simple binary decisions in fiction. Even in complicated scenarios, the choices characters make within those scenarios, from our outsider’s perspective, are basically straightforward. Sometimes doing the right thing is incredibly, almost impossibly, difficult, but we still know what that right thing is, and woe betide anyone who fails to follow it.

But here, nothing's easy. You can say, it's wrong that Sisko asked for Garak's help, because surely he must have known Garak would take whatever steps necessary to ensure the plan would succeed. You can say, after Vreenak's death, it was Sisko's responsibility to turn Garak over to the authorities, and confess to his part in the crime. Yet the guilt of the former is outweighed by those endless casualty reports, by wave after wave of meaningless deaths, by the very real possibility that the Federation might lose the war; and the responsibility of the latter is cast aside by the simple fact that it's too late, and any attempt to find justice would just make everything that much worse. So all that's left is an empty feeling in the pit of one's stomach and the slime left behind by all those moderate capitulations. And the corpses, of course.

Look: that taillight story? That's a stupid story. I've done worse things in my life, and I'm still walking around, but even those worse things aren't comparable to the subject at hand. But that minor accident, that lousy mistake that probably ruined (or at least inconvenienced) someone's day, was the first time I can remember doing the wrong thing, and it not mattering. There was no punishment, no effect, no anything. If it were possible to work out some equation that expressed Sisko's behavior in "Moonlight," a way to balance out the millions of potential lives lost, and the very strong possibility that he'd helped to win the war (a war that Vreenak accuses him of starting, no less), against the immorality of the lies and murder it took to get him there... I don't know. Maybe it would come down to little more than a busted taillight, and the knowledge that this is what we are capable of. This is how we are weak. Sisko can console himself with the thought that life demands impossible decisions, and it could just be that sometimes you have to do something awful to save the day. But he'll always know that there are virtuous, heroic, and noble people in the universe, people who always take the high road, people who don't run away or let their desperation drive them; and whatever else happens, if Sisko is among them, it will always be with an asterisk. You can live with that, though.

Next: We're off until January 9, when we return to our two-episodes-a-week format with "His Way" and "The Reckoning." Happy holidays!

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "His Way"/"The Reckoning"[Zack Handlen](#)[1/09/14 10:00AM](#)**"His Way" (season 6, episode 20; originally aired 4/22/1998)***In which Odo doesn't play piano...*

I've said it before, and I'm sure I'll have reason to say it again: Nana Visitor is a terrific actor. At the start of the series, when even Sisko was floundering a bit, Kira Nerys was the constant that held everything together. Her struggles to reconcile her revolutionary past with her bureaucratic present, combined with the inevitable edginess that comes from working for a stranger who just happens to be your version of Moses, gave texture and depth to an otherwise standard genre show. And even when *Deep Space Nine* found confidence with the rest of its cast, Kira (and Visitor's performance) remained rock solid. This is the first fully realized female lead a *Trek* show has ever given us. That's no knock against Gates McFadden or Marina Sirtis (or Nichelle Nichols, for that matter), all of whom did fine work with the material they were given. But Visitor is something else. Sisko is the lead, but if you squint just right, it's not at all difficult to imagine things from Kira's perspective. That's valuable.

It's also the best and worst part of "His Way," a good-natured attempt to resolve the Odo/Kira romantic tension that doesn't work as neatly as it thinks it does. Well, not as neatly as the writers think it does; I don't think episodes have consciousness. (Actually, I have no idea what the writers were thinking. I'm terrible at my work.) The focus of "His Way" is on Odo's efforts to woo Kira via the advice and counsel of a self-aware holosuite program based on a 1960s lounge-singer/Vegas type named Vic Fontaine (James Darren). This isn't as entirely ridiculous as it sounds, and the fact that it works even remotely is a testament to the actors and the script (by Ira Steven Behr and Hans Bessler). I mean, there are full scenes of Odo pretending to play the piano as Vic sings to a room of entirely

made up people. That could've been a disaster in so many ways, but it's sort of charming and sweet, provided you don't think about it very long.

If there's one thing that "His Way" is good at, it's in encouraging us not think about anything for very long. You have to take each development at face value. Sure, Bashir got a holosuite program that he's so excited about, he wants to share it with his friends. Sure, the program's centerpiece is the aforementioned lounge-singer, who is, again, self-aware; and sure, Bashir mentions this fact casually, as though it's the least-important thing in the world, even though it raises huge questions about artificial intelligence, servitude, and consciousness. Sure, Odo, lovelorn at the thought of Kira going to Bajor to spend time with Shakaar, decides that his best chance is to consult Vic about his problems.

(Actually, I do buy this. Vic's "amazing" insight about people isn't all that impressive, but when you're someone who doesn't understand the social processes that everyone else seems to take for granted, you'll turn to anything for answers, provided that "anything" doesn't mean you have to risk embarrassment in any way.) Sure, Vic will fixate on Odo's woes, first giving him tips on self-confidence, then operating as a kind of digital pimp. Sure, Vic will be so determined to make Odo's dreams come true that he'll break into the computer system, find a holographic image of Kira, and use it to create a Kira-double to give the changeling some time to relax. Sure, Vic will trick Odo and Kira into their first date. Sure, Kira will somehow be okay with this; and sure, the whole thing will end with Odo and Kira making out on the Promenade.

It's nuts—so nuts that I just gave you an entire episode summary, and I hardly ever do that (remember that time Betazed got invaded and I didn't even mention it because I was talking about a car accident? Good times). The storyline repeatedly threatens to float off into the clouds, a goofy, dorky chunk of wish fulfillment both for Odo and whichever writer was still in love with the Rat Pack. Remember "The Outrageous Okona" from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*? That's the episode in which Data has the holodeck create Joe Piscopo to give him comedy tips. It's a dumb, dumb scene. But it's a subplot in the episode, whereas here, Vic Fontaine is the main show. Darren is a hell of a lot more effective than Piscopo (who wasn't god awful or anything), and "His Way" never becomes as cringe-inducing as Data's doomed attempts at stand-up, but it's still a weird way to tell this particular tale. Vic becomes the main moving figure in the action, when by all accounts the focus should be on Kira and Odo. Instead of "two people finally recognizing the depths of their feelings for each other," it's "shy guy uses technology to get laid." That's a crappy '80s teen comedy, not the premise of a smart, challenging show like this one usually is.

But it's not unbearable, because the actors find some degree of authenticity buried under the foolishness. Rene Auberjonois is his usual reliable self, and he basically sells Odo's fright and his loneliness; things get a little strained during his dinner date with Kira, but that's probably because his gentle, loving approach kept giving me flashbacks to the Odo from "Children Of Time." Regardless, he's in character throughout, and his behavior makes sense. Darren is good in an utterly unexamined role. For all anyone cares, he could've just as easily been a genie from a bottle Odo confiscated out of one of Quark's smuggling operations. The "holosuite" touch means he technically fits into the world of the series, but the lack of interest anyone seems to have in understanding just what the hell he is, and what he means, transforms him into a plot-mover; charming enough, but singularly distracting. If the writers really wanted to use tech to help Odo get over his cold feet, why does the tech have to be self-aware? This story shouldn't be about him. It shouldn't even really be about Odo learning to lighten up.

The heart of all of this is Odo feeling's for Major Kira, and whether or not she reciprocates those feelings in a way that could lead to a romantic relationship. Odo's ability to fake play a piano and flirt with computer programs are irrelevant, and they speak to a very frustrating blind spot on the part of the show's writers. As good as *DS9* is, its track record with convincing relationships is mixed at best, and this has all the hallmarks of a creative team deciding on an ending, but then being completely unaware of the legwork required to get there. Yes, being charming and relaxed in real life is generally a better way to meet people, but Odo isn't trying to meet people. He's not trying to seduce Kira, or even tell her how he feels about her. He just needs to ask her out, and then deal with whatever happens next. As light and basically harmless as so much of this episode is, too much of it comes from the same mindset that gives us "pick-up artists" as an actual term; people (men) who think romantic relationships aren't about communication, trust, and mutual attraction, but a series of tricks designed to manipulate your "target" into fucking you. Vic's approach is nowhere near this crude or overtly misogynistic, but the angle of the episode misses the heart of its own story, so that the moments of honesty and legitimate connection are few and far between.

Most of those moments come from or around Kira herself. She spends too much of the episode on Bajor hanging with Shakaar, but when she returns, Visitor manages to sell Kira's changing attitude towards Odo so convincingly that it's almost possible to believe in that final kiss. Her warmth, tentativeness, and frustration are complex and easy to relate to, which makes it all the more frustrating that the script treats her like a secondary figure, a prize to be won, instead of the character who is facing the most difficult decision of anyone. Kira's choice is the one that matters here, not Odo's. We already know where Odo stands when it comes to dating, re: Nerys. It's up to her to decide if this is something she wants to move forward with, and yet the script falls to justify or ground that decision in any meaningful way. There's some vague hand-waving about Kira "not seeing" this side of Odo before, but it's not enough. If she wanted to pursue a relationship with him, why wouldn't she?

There's been plenty of time. I could believe in a willingness to let things go on as they always have, and the idea that both parties would need some sort of push to move to the next level, but as is, it's just Odo taking cool guy tips and Kira going, "Gosh!" and telling Dax about her moments of clarity. Visitor sells this well, so well that there were moments when the hour nearly transcended its limitations; there were beats during their dinner date when Kira would look at Odo a certain way, or say a line just so, and it was possible, however briefly, to accept the fantasy. And the final shouting match between the two of them that leads to the big kiss is better than all the forced romanticism leading up to it. But Visitor is so good I found myself questioning her behavior throughout; not because the actress couldn't keep the character consistent, but because she seemed so much more thoughtful and real than the situation allowed. Kira's allowed a few moments of agency, but they largely serve to underline how badly the writers have handled her various romances. Apart from some vague daddy issues, there's no sense of what Kira is looking for, and pairing off with Odo, as gratifying as it is for anyone who's suffered the pangs of disprized love, isn't entirely justifiable. Whether or not you accept it, this still feels like fantasy. Worse, it feels like a one-sided fantasy. Odo gets what he wants, and I guess Kira wants it to, but it would be nice to not have to guess.

Stray observations:

- Gotta love how casually Bashir says, "He's a program who knows he's a program" (roughly), as if that isn't one of the fundamental requirements of artificial intelligence.

- Once again, creating computer simulations of actual people, even when those simulations don't behave like that person would, is really, really creepy. The fact that Vic is the one that uses Kira's image to generate a lounge singer program makes it a little more understandable (he's a program himself, he probably wouldn't see the problem), but Odo's willingness to go along with it for as long as he does is kind of sad. When he mistakes Kira for a program, and Kira finds out, I was shocked she wasn't more upset. At the very least, it seems like it should be a bigger deal than it actually is.
- Just to be a complete spoilsport, the Odo/Kira pairing continues the show's trend of pairing strange looking aliens with gorgeous women. Not saying it's intentional, but it'd be nice if Bashir started dating someone two heads or something.
- "Don't say it. Computer, end program." Vic can turn himself on and off. HOW IS THIS NOT TERRIFYING.

"The Reckoning" (season 6, episode 21; originally aired 4/29/1998)

In which the Sisko breaks something priceless...

This is absolutely ridiculous, but I'm not going to lie: I kind of loved it. Oh, it doesn't really fit the show, but then, neither did "His Way." Two weeks ago, we had a hero who was willing to allow murder and forgery to go unchallenged in order to get what he wanted. Now, it's digitized lounge singers and ghosts having wizard fights on the Promenade. The moral complexity has been shoved aside in favor of broad, crowd-pleasing comedy and loopy genre mysticism, and if you're a fan of the series who disliked one or both of this week's episodes, I sympathize. But while I had reservations about "His Way" (although I didn't hate it), I found "The Reckoning" marvelously entertaining, and a nice change of pace from the show's more serious arc stories. Oh sure, there's a lot of grim portent about Bajor's future, and Kai Winn is once again an unlikable (if understandable) killjoy, but the episode ends with a *wizard fight*. A wizard fight that is cut short by the Kai's jealousy and cowardice, which means that the evil Pah-Wraith is still out there somewhere, which means there's a chance of another wizard fight down the line. This is the best!

As long as I'm doing the honest thing: despite having taken notes and paid attention to every episode I've seen so far (which is every episode up to and including this one), I don't have a great grasp on Bajoran mythology. I'm not sure if that's the show's fault or my own. When everyone started talking about Pah-Wraiths, I recognized the term, and knew it had been brought up before, but that's about all I could remember. A simple Google search could clear up the confusion (although I just did a search to see if there was a hyphen between "Pah" and "Wraith," and I think I inadvertently stumbled over a spoiler, so none of that, thanks), but I'm also not convinced it's necessary. The trappings of mythology are there for people who enjoy them, but they've never been the main reason to watch a show. If you care about where the Cylons came from on *Battlestar Galactica*, more power to you, but that's not really what makes Starbuck and Apollo and Adam and Roslin's story so great. Drama comes from what happens in the moment, contextualized through history, but that history only really has an impact if we get to see it. So, a ten minute monologue explaining which Cylon model came from where and why is a lot less compelling than, say, Starbuck and Apollo beating the shit out of each other in the boxing ring while we flashback to their reasons for being upset with one another. One is recitation, the other is something that's actually happening.

There is definitely stuff happening in “The Reckoning.” Bajoran archaeologists find a tablet with Sisko’s “name” on it (there’s a symbol for the Emissary), and Sisko, after getting a vision from the Prophets when he touches the thing, takes the tablet back to DS9 for study. There’s some squabbling with Winn over property rights, but ultimately, Sisko breaks the tablet, and Kira is possessed by one of the Prophets. Then Jake is possessed by a Pah-Wraith, and the two begin the “reckoning,” a conflict whose outcome will decide if Bajor is destined for 1000 years of peace and prosperity, or something much, much worse. So it’s not just people delivering monologues. And yet the details blur together. Why do the Prophets need to fight this specific Pah-Wraith? Why will this have any effect on Bajor? And why has Bajor been thrown into chaos before the fight begins? Winn claims it’s because Sisko removed the tablet, but given that the Prophets wanted him to break the damn thing, I doubt they cared much about where he did it.

Maybe the Pah-Wraith itself is responsible for the earthquakes and floods. Although that wouldn’t explain the ghostly shapes that come out of the tablet when it shatters. Maybe all of this will be explained at a future date. But I prefer not to know, because I don’t particularly care. The Prophets and the Pah-Wraiths are ill-defined creatures, operating on planes of existence we can barely glimpse, let alone comprehend; they are concepts, not characters, and their motives, even when defined, remain abstract. And while DS9 has done some interesting work in trying to balance religious viewpoints against the franchise’s science-fiction based perspective, the more events which are explained by “Eh, some gods did it,” the closer we are to the original Trek, with all its nutty godlike beings and half-assed causality. That worked fine back then, but this show needs a certain foundation of reality. The less we know about these Prophets, then, the better; their occasional strained interactions with “the Sisko” work best when they could be explained by either logic or, for want of a better word, magic, and too many details makes the balance harder to maintain.

As neat looking (and, okay, silly) as the battle between Kira and Jake is, it’s a sideshow; the real battle is what goes down between Winn and Sisko, and how Kira attempts to deal with both sides. Winn remains one of the show’s more effective villains. Louise Fletcher’s perpetually calm line readings give the kai a sort of infuriating invulnerability; any argument anyone tries to make, she can simply retreat behind a wall of stoic, barely discernable disdain. Whatever side she is on, that’s the side of the righteous, and the righteous are impossible to argue against effectively. The big challenge is in trying to make her more than a one note enemy. For her first few appearances, Winn’s self-centered ambition and ego were enough to justify her actions, but as the show goes on, she needs a few more shades. Not to diminish her impact or make her less threatening, but to prevent her from becoming one-note and tedious. On the whole, the writers have managed to make this work, although to a certain extent, Winn always stays removed.

That doesn’t exactly change in “The Reckoning,” but she’s... well, I don’t want to say sympathetic, exactly, but for her first few scenes, I did almost find myself agreeing with her. The problem is that Sisko decides to take the tablet from the burial site without consulting Winn or the Bajoran government. Presumably the monks on the site who brought the find to the captain’s attention weren’t bothered by him bringing it back to DS9 (at least, we don’t get a scene of Sisko, Kira, and Jake shooting a bunch of unarmed, but angry, Bajorans), but it’s still a breach in protocol. Besides, while Sisko is the Emissary, which presumably gives him a certain leeway, he’s also a representative of the Federation, and there’s something decidedly off-putting about an interstellar conglomerate casually removing priceless artifacts from planets when the mood takes them. We understand Sisko does what

he does with the best of intentions, but his justification—he felt that this is what the Prophets wanted him to do— isn't going to reassure anyone who's in the mood to question his motives.

Which isn't to say that Winn herself is operating from a position of purest moral authority. As Kira reminds Sisko (and us), the kai has been in a tough spot ever since Sisko arrived on the scene. His existence, and on-going relationship with the Prophets, forces her to question her heretofore unshakable conviction of her own divine value. It's a bit like Salieri and Mozart in *Amadeus*, only here, the *Amadeus* figure isn't a guy who crawls around making fart jokes in between composing the most beautiful music in the world. If Sisko exists, then Winn isn't as important as she thought she was; because Sisko is the Emissary, and that means the Prophets were looking to choose someone, and that means they didn't pick her.

While this back-and-forth between Winn and Sisko (and, for a couple of scenes, Winn and Kira) isn't as immediately pleasurable as all those special effects, it gives the episode a story that has more relevance than some pyrotechnic antics between immortal (or seemingly immortal) beings. The Prophet/Pah-Wraith fight has supposed consequences, but even though the spirits possess the bodies of people we care about, the sequence is less like a conflict and more like a sudden tornado; potentially life-threatening, but a fundamentally external event which robs our heroes of the complexity of their responses. There's only so much you can do when a tornado's coming, after all. But Sisko's refusal to leave the station, combined with his faith in the Prophets, is interesting in and of themselves, especially considering that his faith remains strong even after Jake is possessed. It tells us something about him that will be important even after the current crisis has passed.

And Winn gets the most important moment of free will in the whole hour, deciding in the heat of the battle to flood the Promenade with chroniton particles, forcing the Prophet and the Pah-Wraith (coming this fall to ABC!) to flee the station. It's a completely unexpected choice, as it seemingly contradicts Winn's early conviction that the prophecy must be allowed to unfold without interference—yet it makes sense. There's a moment when Winn offers herself to the Prophet, desperate to be a part of the history unfolding before her, and the Prophet ignores her entreaties; and for all that Winn has done, and for all that her decision might lead to, it's still possible to feel some pity for her. She's a selfish monster who has devoted her life to the conviction that she understood her gods better than anyone. Then she met God, and It didn't recognize her. That would ruin anybody's day.

Stray observations:

- I suspect that Sisko's deal with the Prophets in the wormhole (with the candlestick) would have consequences. Possibly because the Prophets themselves suggested it would. Those consequences haven't arrived yet, but it's good that they haven't been forgotten.
- This is the first chance we get to see Kira and Odo as a couple, and I think it basically works. A bit cutesy, but Odo's respect for Kira's spiritual wishes is a more compelling argument for their relationship than a dozen holosuite programs. They still seem more like very good friends than lovers, though.
- If Kai Winn hadn't intervened, would Jake have died? And now that she did intervene, I wonder what happens next.
- While I appreciate the attempt to give Jake something to do before the ghost possesses him, his concerns over Sisko's role as the Emissary aren't telling us anything new. There's only so

much you can do with “I’m worried about you, Dad,” and “I know, son, and I love you, but that won’t affect my behavior in any way.”

- I like Dax, Super Interpreter.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Valiant”/“Profit And Lace”[Zack Handlen](#)[1/16/14 10:00AM](#)**“Valiant” (season 6, episode 22; originally aired 5/6/1998)***In which we can be heroes, but just for one day...*

There are explosions and space battles aplenty in “Valiant,” but the episode’s single most important effect is its casting; specifically, the casting of the under-age crew of the titular Federation vessel. While en route to Ferenginar to try and pitch a potential Federation/Ferengi alliance, Nog and Jake run afoul of a wing of Jem’Hadar ships. They try to escape, but a single Jem’Hadar fighter gives chase, leading to a battle the little runabout has no chance of winning. Fortunately, the *USS Valiant* arrives in the nick of time to take over the fight, destroy the the Jem’Hadar ship, and beam Jake and Nog to safety. Which is great news, but the first voice our heroes hear in the new ship is a young woman’s; the “woman” part is fine, but the “young” is unusual, since she appears to be running the transporters on her own. (This character turns out to be, I think, the ship’s Chief Medical Officer.) Even worse, when Nog and Jake are taken up to the bridge, they find a whole crew of teenagers running the show, from the captain on down. Everyone is highly efficient and dedicated to their tasks, but that initial shock from hearing a young voice when you expect an adult one never goes away. It’s wrong somehow. Like seeing kids play pretend, only with real bullets.

Like I said: It’s the casting that makes this work. Not in terms of specific actors. The episode’s guest stars are, judged individually, a mixed bag. Paul Popowich does well as the in-way-over-his-head Captain Tim Watters, and Ashley McDonogh is nicely understated as the aforementioned Chief Dorian Collins, but Courtney Peldon’s turn as Farris, Watters’ second in command, is strident and basically one note, and nobody else gets a chance to distinguish themselves. But that’s beside the point. The

job was taken care of as soon as the casting director stuck to getting young faces in age appropriate roles, because as soon as you see them, you know they're doomed. This is a story which gets most of its power from the sense of avoidable but inevitable tragedy that hangs over all these characters. The harder they work, the more they believe the lie—that they can do anything, that they are adults and ready for this and anyone who suggests otherwise is directly insulting their commitment—and the more doomed they become. Jake realizes it soon enough: he and Nog have been rescued by a ghost ship that doesn't yet realize its dead.

"Valiant" gets a large part of its power from its directness, with an uncluttered storyline that manages to get the point across without ever stooping to lecture or pedantry. There are a couple of scenes that hand you the moral, admittedly; Jake makes a plea for common sense when Captain Watters first announces his foolhardy plan to take down a Jem'Hadar battle cruiser, and at the end of the episode, Nog, having briefly fallen under the captain's spell, explains in broad terms why things went so badly. But neither of these scenes feel like lectures, and both are necessary. Nog is the only major character to go through any kind of arc, and having seen him fight with Jake over Watters' orders, and then watched those orders misfire in spectacular and devastating fashion, it's necessary to give him a chance to get back to himself. His decisions are understandable, even sympathetic, and speak to a subtle criticism of authoritarian systems that runs throughout the hour. After committing himself to following orders and striving to be his best ("best" here defined by what Starfleet considers it to be), why wouldn't Nog jump at the opportunity to prove himself? Why wouldn't any of those students—all of whom are members of the fabled Red Squad, the Academy elite we first heard of way back in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, when Wesley was tarnishing his perfect record with student killing shenanigans.

Jake's speech is equally important, because this story wouldn't be so creepy and sad if there wasn't at least one person around with a little bit of perspective. It becomes clear early on that Watters is in over his head; despite his calm demeanor and lack of overt twitches, the wrongness of a ship in war staffed entirely by young, inexperienced cadets seems to drive his every action. He needs to prove how good they are, how well they belong in the position they've stumbled into (the seven adults who were in charge of running the training mission all died in combat), not necessarily for ego or glory, but because that how his existence has been defined up to this point. I'm reading a little into things, as Ron Moore's script never gets very heavy with the backstory, but there seems precious little overt ego in any member of the *Valiant's* crew. They have the tense, slightly nervous look of students who study six or seven hours a night; students for whom an A- is really just another way of failing. Watters both exemplifies this and holds them together as a young man hellbent on becoming a hero through willpower alone. It's a spell that's easy to fall under, so long as you don't catch him downing pills. Jake's attempt to wake everyone up is a necessary counterpoint, to show us just how far the *Valiant's* crew has committed itself.

What really makes this episode work for me is that it never strains itself to prove its point, and that it doesn't blink when it comes time to demonstrate the consequences of Watters' decisions. The captain's use of amphetamines (or whatever) to hold himself together is an obvious clue, but it's not something the script ever fixates on; there's no scene of Watters sobbing or raging about the pressure he's under. Dorian, the only character we do see break down, does so briefly, after Jake ask her a (completely innocent) question about home, and the captain and his second in command immediately clamp down on the incident, telling (well, ordering) Jake to stop upsetting people. But the only other

time Jake disrupts anything is when he gets in a fight with Nog in Engineering, after which Watters has him thrown into the brig. Those few signs we get of weakness are all that are necessary; they're like fine cracks in a windshield that's just getting ready to break. This does mean that we don't really get a sense of the personalities of the rest of the crew, which makes their fate arguably more a cautionary tale than a dramatic one. But watching Nog deal with what happens, and inferring just what's going on inside of the heads of all these desperate, deluded young people, keeps the exercise from being academic.

Then there's the ending, in which everybody but Jake, Nog, and Dorian die. It's brutal, eased only slightly by the fact that Dorian represents about a third of the people on board the ship who we knew anything about; otherwise, it's just seeing Watters and Farris and a bunch of (not wearing red) redshirts become toast. But it works, partly for its totality, and partly because of that horrible moment when they risk everything for their goal (targeting a certain part of the Jem'Hadar cruiser that's made of a certain metal that makes it vulnerable to a certain kind of torpedo), using all their skills to out-maneuver the much larger, more powerful ship; how after taking several hits and sticking their necks out about as far as they can go, they get in close enough to launch the torpedo, hitting the target; and it looks like they've succeeded and they're finally as good as they need to be—and it doesn't work. It isn't that Nog fails to engineer the torpedo properly, or that the helm misses, or that the crew didn't want it badly enough. It just wasn't a good enough plan, and because of that, because their need to prove themselves overwhelmed whatever better judgement they had left, they died. Because they were young, and lacked the experience to realize that failure is always an option, no matter how hard you study.

Stray observations:

- The generally inexperienced performances add a lot to the episode, I think; everyone seems so quiet and serious and completely out of place. (The bridge shots are especially bizarre.) The brief scene near the end with Sisko and the regular crew of the *Defiant* is almost ridiculously comforting.
- "He may have been a hero. He may even have been a great man. But in the end, he was a bad captain."—Nog
- I almost forgot; there's a scene in the cold open in which Odo deduces that Quark is secretly in love with Dax. And then Quark stares at Dax's ass. Which is as good a segue as any into...

"Profit And Lace" (season 6, episode 23; originally aired 5/13/1998)

It's just terrible, okay?

Ugh. Okay, since someone suggested this in the comments last week, and since I don't want to dwell on this anymore than I have to, we're breaking out the old "notes style" review. If you're worried this means I'll go easy on the episode, or that I'll fail to point out why it's a giant piece of shit, take comfort in the fact that you are wrong. While it's not wall to wall terrible (the middle 20 minutes, while not good, are largely just really tedious), the bad parts are bad enough to earn this hour its wretched reputation. Everyone should be embarrassed this even made it past the concept stage, and "Profit And Lace" threatens to undo all of the good work the show has managed in making the Ferengi race more than just walking punchlines.

Things get awful fast:

Quark is delivering a glowing employee performance review of a dabo girl. He's so going to harass her. This is already creepy.

Most dud episodes reveal themselves soon enough, but few do so within the first minute. Here, we have Quark acting out a scene from a sexual harassment employee training video, except it's not a video, and he's not exactly acting. In later seasons, the show has wisely downplayed Quark's "monstrous boss" side, avoiding overt suggestions that he takes advantage of the dabo girls, but there's no subtlety to this at all. After telling the woman (Aluura, played by Symba Smith) that everyone loves her work, Quark proceeds to tell her that he himself feels like she could be nicer to him, and then offers her a book called *Oo-mox For Fun And Profit*. I guess everyone thought they could get away with this sort of thing because "oo-mox" is just ear rubbing, but basically, Quark—the story's hero—just told this nice woman that either she gives him a handjob, or he's firing her. Yay. (Given the later events of the episode, you'd think that this scene would be a set up to Quark learning a valuable lesson about respect and boundaries and whatnot. It is not!)

Rom can't get ahold of anyone Ferenginar. This is a huge loss.

Yeah, let's all have a moment of silence because whatever.

Rom is worried that the Dominion has invaded Ferenginar. His concerns are mocked, because they are hilarious.

They really are. I guess a more serious episode could've suggested that the Dominion might target Ferenginar in order to threat the universal economy or something, but that would require use to take the Ferengi seriously at all, which is something the story desperately needs us not to do. If we take any of this seriously, it would be less funny, right? Right?

Grand Nagus Zek and Moogie approach! The music tells me it's fun.

Alexander Siddig directed "Profit And Lace," and, well. I like Siddig a lot. The last episode he directed, ["Business As Usual,"](#) was quite good, so we'll just assume he got the short end of the stick here and worked way too hard to compensate. Because this episode is full of aggressively "wacky" touches that repeatedly draw attention to themselves, and only serve to underline how ill-conceived the story really is. I'll admit it: before Quark got a temporary sex change, there were a couple of jokes I snickered at. And hell, even after, Nog is kind of goofily endearing. But no matter how many weird transitions (there's this bit where Zek blows on his beetle snuff and there's a huge cloud of smoke that leads into the next scene—which has no smoke in it—that looks like it belongs in a Disney sitcom) and camera angles and heavy-handed music cues, there's no way to make this work.

Zek added an amendment giving females the right to wear clothes. Economy went into chaos with women wearing clothes.

I'm going to give the writers the benefit of the doubt here, because I'm like that: There's a germ of a good idea in all this. Ishka's push for a more enlightened Ferenginar has been a background runner for a few seasons now, and the idea that she might finally achieve her goal is, if somewhat simplistic, at

least potentially exciting. Social change episodes don't have to be inherently terrible, and there's drama in the idea of Quark's own mother spearheading worldwide reform. Except even acknowledging that this could've gone somewhere just makes the crap we got that much worse. Ishka doesn't succeed by protest and powerful political movement; she succeeds by marrying the memory-addled Grand Nagus and comically forcing him to do what she wants. Just as bad, while the plot is kicked off by the Ferenginar suffrage movement, women have little to know involvement in the actual story. Ishka stands on the sidelines offering pep-talks and sarcasm until a fight with Quark puts her on bedrest for a week. Leeta (remember Leeta?) gives a few tips on how to be a woman, and not much else. Every other character is male. It's absurd.

Zek was deposed. Brunt has taken over, because he is the only other Ferengi character we can remember. Huzzah.

How many Ferengi are there, anyway? Five? Six?

They have three days to get Zek's job back.

And we care why? I guess it's because if Brunt remains in control, he'll find some way to get rid of the amendment giving women the right to do business, but it plays more like Brunt is threatening Quark's business, which, whatever.

"Remember, she's Rom's wife." "Meaning?" "Meaning she's broke!"

Ha ha, it's funny that the gross old man keeps hitting on the pretty lady who's married to his son-in-law.

Commissioner Nilva, the chairman of Slug-o-Cola. Really? Everybody knows the Slug-o-Cola song, which is cute.

The sad thing is, when all the actors get together to plot their strategy (in this case, finding at least one investor to help Zek regain his position), they have great chemistry together. And the "Really" was because "Slug-O-Cola" is a stupid name. (Also makes me wonder if the writers of [Futurama](#) ever watched this.)

Okay, then Acting Grand Nagus Brunt shows up to give us something vaguely like suspense, there's some squabbling, and Quark throws him out of the bar. Which makes it seem like Quark is a good guy or something until:

Quark blames his mom for her efforts at suffrage and equal rights. Our hero. "You're the worst thing that ever happened to the entire Ferengi Alliance!" -Quark

Admittedly, this isn't a new twist for the character; he's been objected to Ishka's efforts from the start, and this is a moment of very high stress. It's also necessary for him to say something really awful to justify Ishka's collapse. But man, what a maroon.

This isn't really awful so much as boring right now.

True story: for about 20 minutes or so, I wasn't sure what all the fuss was about. The cold open was godawful, no question, but once I got past that, everything was just kind of stupid and goofy. Sure, the idea that the enfranchisement of females would throw an entire planet into chaos sounds like the most crazed of anti-feminist fever dreams, but that happened off-screen. It wasn't a good episode, or even a passable one, but it wasn't making me want to rip my eyeballs out or anything. But then...

Ah, Nilva's expecting to meet a brilliant Ferengi female, so I'm guessing somebody's going to end up in drag.

Past Zack sounds so young here. So full of life.

Called it. Quark is gonna be, I dunno, Quarkina.

Ha ha. You poor bastard.

Oh lord, he's talking in a soft voice. And Bashir did a "procedure" on him. And he's immediately uncertain about his looks. "There go his hormones." Man, really glad we could get some weird-ass sexism in here. He's worried about his hips!

Men in drag can be funny. I love me some Monty Python and Kids In The Hall and *Tootsie*. But the approach is important. With Python and the Kids, the drag work didn't rely on the basic fact of "men in dress, ha ha!" to work; the performers took their characters seriously, even if we didn't. Same thing with *Tootsie*, and there, the joke was almost never about the concept of drag, but about the failings of the man doing it (he makes an ugly woman), or the horrible sexism he never realized was happening all around him. Trying to make a joke around how outrageous it is for a man to wear women's clothing has a limited appeal. You can get a few snickers about high heels and makeup, but it dries out quickly.

Quark is ostensibly trying to be as convincing a woman as possible, but the show goes about this in the worst way, relying on shallow stereotypes (women are emotional! women walk sexily! women are objects whose sole purpose in existing is to be desired by men!) to get the point across and never projecting much sense of danger or tension. After all, Quark isn't turning into "Lumba" for fun; he needs to convince another Ferengi that he's a woman, and that women have a valid place in commerce and represent a potentially vast consumer base. But the whole thing is so light and, again, stupid, that there's none of the suspense a situational comedy like this really needs to work. And even if there was, it would still be terrible, because everyone involved seems to view women as some sort of exotic other, a mystery understood only by the mystics and, I guess, Nog. (There are some jokes about Nog knowing how to walk like a lady which suggest a very odd past, but those jokes primarily exist because ha ha, it's funny when a dude knows lady stuff.) I can completely believe that Quark and Zek wouldn't know a damn thing about being a woman, but Leeta is right there and she's worse than they are.

Now Quark is hitting on Zek. What is this?

It's the Elmer Fudd rule: The instant a male dresses up as a female, every other male around will find "her" irresistibly attractive. Only that gag gets whatever limited laughs it has in it from the fact that

most males don't make very attractive females (at least, most males dressing up as females for comedic purposes, excepting Dave Foley and honestly Jack Lemmon), and since "Lumba" looks just as freakish to our eyes as every other Ferengi female we've seen, the concept is even dumber than it already was. And hell, Zek's apparent immediate attraction to lady Quark is too idiotic to be even remotely amusing because he clearly knows that Quark is a dude. Unless this is suggesting Zek has some kind of secret life.

Nilva arrives. (And this is Henry Gibson! I like Henry Gibson.)

It is, and I do. If nothing else, Gibson fully commits to the role.

This script is going to a lot of lengths to make sure Nilva has to meet with Lumba quicker than expected. It's not particularly suspenseful.

Yeah, this bit is weird. Ishka collapses; Zek comes up with a plan; Quark has an operation; and Nilva arrives a day ahead of schedule, which gives Quark less time to research his role. Theoretically, this should all be a kind of madcap rush to disaster, but the pacing never really gets out of first gear, not even when Zek desperately tries to stall Nilva from having dinner with "Lumba." I think they were going for farce, maybe? But it certainly doesn't play like farce. Also, before Nilva arrives, we're told he's a hardliner for the old ways, which suggests that Quark has his work cut out for him; yet Nilva never seems anything less than friendly and open-minded. Well, friendly and open-minded and rapey, but ha ha, it's Pepe Le Pew style rape, which makes it funny why are you looking at me like that.

The camera cranes up—ah, the group is looking down and eavesdropping. Weird shot.

Siddig strikes again.

Ah, the power of capitalism to foment social change.

Again, that's an interesting idea, because it appeals to the cold profiteering nature of all great Ferengi business people. I could see it maybe working in a better episode, especially if a woman was saying it. You could argue that Quark, in making the argument for Ferengi females, is expanding his horizons, but it doesn't really play that way. He's oddly passive throughout the story, doing what others tell him and trying to carry out their plans and not his own.

Quark keeps up with a new slogan for Slug-O-Cola designed to appeal to women, which is about as bad as it sounds.

It's like Don Draper, but in the future! And it makes you hate life!

They're going to have dessert in Nilva's quarters. Maybe Quark is going to learn a little less in boundaries and respect? Oh yay, they're doing the around-the-table run. And now Quark is defending himself against sexual assault.

Finally we get to the climax of the pain parade. Nilva has fallen for "Lumba," and is desperate to take their relationship to the next level. "Lumba" isn't interested in his advances. So for what feels like

ages, we get to watch Nilva chase Quark around the apartment, shouting and pleading all the while. The whole thing seems terribly, hideously familiar, right down to Quark's "You have a wife" and Nilva's "She hasn't rubbed my lobes in years!" exchange. It's supposed to be funny, and if you squint, you could see it as Quark getting a taste of his own medicine, but the whole thing is so overplayed that it has no resemblance to Quark's earlier attempts to force himself on Aluura. In fact, it makes Quark look like a much more effective monster, truth be told. As humor goes, it's not funny because it's kind of offensive and deeply lame, and as offenses go, it's too hollow to even be shocking. It's just a miserable waste of time and talent.

Brunt knows that Lumba is Quark. How did he figure it out? The disguise was so perfect!

Did I miss a scene? I could have. I'm not sure how Brunt sees through "Lumba," unless it's the fact that Quark as a female looks basically like Quark. It's just weird that Brunt shows up when he does, like the writers decided they needed a way out of the scene that wasn't Quark beating Nilva to death.

Quark makes out with Nilva. Awesome. And then he opens his dress. This is happy!

What the hell surgery did Bashir do, anyway? The future is a remarkable place.

Quark, out of drag. Thank god. He's enjoying the ring Nilva gave him. "There was a sweetness to him, and also a strength." WHAT?

See, it's funny because Quark is... no, but he's still... and then there's... fuck it. You know? Fuck it.

"And you're being a little overly sensitive." Just like a woman, hahahahahahaha.

There's other stuff I could've done tonight, you realize. I could've read a book, or edited something, or played a video game, or sat in a corner facing the wall for a few hours. Lots of stuff.

Aluura again, and now Quark is no longer going to sexually harass her. So that's nice. She thought oo-mox sounded like fun. Boy. Comedy is delightful. "What am I saying? Aluura, wait!"

To sum up: Quark threatens to fire an employee unless she grants him sexual favors. Then we spend a whole 40 minutes on Quark eventually kind of sort of learning to appreciate the female species, or something. Then he finds out Aluura is actually into the "oo-mox" thing (???), and while he's briefly kind and apologetic to her, he immediately recants and, presumably, the fuckery commences in earnest. No one learned anything, no one changed, no one grew. Nothing meant anything. Glad we could share this together. Now if you'll excuse me, there's a wall that needs staring.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Time’s Orphan”/“The Sound Of Her Voice”[Zack Handlen](#)[1/23/14 10:00AM](#)**“Time’s Orphan” (season 6, episode 24; originally aired 5/20/1998)***In which Molly needs a haircut...*

Boy, when *Deep Space Nine* hits the skids, it hits hard. The quality hasn’t disappeared entirely (we were just talking about [“In The Pale Moonlight”](#) a month ago, and I’d say [“Valiant”](#) is very strong), but this week marks the first dud of a double feature I’ve had to review in a while. Coming off “Profit And Lace,” that stings; neither “Time’s Orphan” nor “The Sound Of Her Voice” are as bad as that nadir, and both are certainly well-intentioned and lacking in horribly unfunny sexism, but neither really works, and they fail in troubling ways. There’s something strangely empty about both hours, and considering how hard each story tries to lean on the audience’s emotions, that’s a problem.

The premise of “Time’s Orphan” certainly sounds upsetting enough: While the O’Briens are enjoying a picnic on an idyllic planet, little Molly goes wandering off and manages to fall into a time vortex that sends her 300 years into the past. Some tech babble and desperate engineering ensues, and O’Brien, with the help of Dax and a few others, is able to put together a machine that will allow them to beam Molly directly through the vortex. But the calculations go wrong, and the Molly they get is 10 years older than the one they lost, having spent the last decade keeping herself alive somehow. 18 year-old Molly is feral, mute, and doesn’t seem to recognize her parents. So after losing their daughter for a maybe a day or two of their own time, Miles and Keiko are forced to cope with this version of their child who is almost, but not quite, entirely unlike the girl who got left behind.

If you strip this down to its basics, maybe imagine the whole scenario as a shipwreck or kidnapping sort of thing, it's heartbreaking; to lose someone, then "rescue" them only to realize that everything's changed and you can't fix what went wrong, you can only rearrange your life around it, would be a nightmare for all involved. The scenes of Miles and Keiko carefully, patiently trying to reconnect with this hairy young woman they've been told is their child are well done, to the extent that the actors involve convey that what they're doing is difficult, slow, and often unsettling. Of course, it's possible, if one is not in the frame of mind to be charitable, to find something funny in the way adult Molly (Michelle Krusiec) acts like an ape. The actress is fine, but there's something ridiculous about her behavior, and about the stolid, grim-faced way the O'Briens approach it. Their 8-year-old girl got turned into Encino (Wo)Man, and that's kind of fucked up and kind of hilarious all at once.

But "Time's Orphan" isn't supposed to be amusing, and that's a problem when you consider just how much goofy plotting it takes to get the premise to work. The O'Briens have to be picnicking within walking distance of a time vortex, and while kids go wandering off on their own all the time (and bad things do, sadly, happen to some of them), the fact that Molly is able to find probably the worst place on the entire planet to fall into in, like, thirty seconds, is a bit of a stretch. Also, why the hell was the vortex even on? Dax's casual "Oh, we've determined she's gone back 300 years in time," as if that's no more a surprise than someone accidentally sliding on some black ice, is silly; the line is there to establish that poor Molly is entirely on her own (the colonists who set up the vortex in the first place having long since disappeared), and to set up the time travel shenanigans which are about to ensue, but it draws attention to the core idea's shortcomings by reminding us how unlikely this all is.

It gets worse, too. Miles grabs his daughter from the wrong point in time, because if he didn't, this would be a very short episode. Which means we're supposed to assume that little Molly, without any guidance or support or training, managed to survive for a decade on her own? That's a long shot, to be charitable. I'm sure she's a resourceful kid, and that her parents taught her as well as they could, but she lives in a future of magic replicators and instant medicine. It would've made more sense if apes had taken her in. Then there's the weirdness when Miles and Keiko realize what happened, and decide that, instead of trying to go back to the vortex and beam Molly out at the right age, they're going to make things work with the Molly they have on hand. I get that temporal ethics are hard to parse, and it would be strange to look at a version of a person you loved and say, "Let's delete the last 10 years of her life," but wouldn't that be a mercy in this case? This Molly doesn't seem especially happy or grateful for being stranded and alone and deeply psychologically scarred; the fact that it's literally possible for our heroes to get a do-over, and this is dismissed as some kind of weak or immoral choice is bizarre. Especially when this is basically what happens anyway.

Any time a story requires this much plausibility stretching and hand-waving, it's a bad sign. Once you get past all that, "Time's Orphan" has some minor things to say about the challenges facing parents with a special needs child, but the metaphor gets clunky: at times, it's less like a human being they're dealing with, and more like a beast they're trying to train. And while the situation shouldn't have to be a specific metaphor in order to be effective, it's not all that exciting on its own terms. For this whole premise to be even remotely believable from a character perspective, Miles and Keiko would have to be in shock for pretty much the entire hour. At the very least, they'd have to go through more emotional upheaval than we see—they lost 10 years of their daughter's life, and the strain of having to deal with that, along with the fact that, to them, Molly has only been gone a day or two, would have

to be nearly unbearable. But apart from a few sighs, neither parent comes across as truly struggling with their situation.

It only gets really difficult for them when Molly's inability to adjust to her new life results in her stabbing a dude in Quark's bar. The problem shifts from "how can we reconnect with our daughter" to "how can we provide a life for our daughter when she's been significantly altered by her time in the wild." The solution: send her back to where she was. This is a very stupid solution. The script (by Bradley Thompson and David Weddle, based on a story by Joe Menosky) struggles to create an inescapable dilemma much the same way it struggled to give us Feral Molly in the first half of the episode, but it falls apart under even a moment's consideration. Molly stabs a guy, but the guy survives; he's pressing charges, but so what? What's the legal system involved here? The Federation wants to put Molly in a special care facility, which isn't great, and clearly she's struggling to adapt, but she's just fine in the holosuite, and it's only been, what, a week? A month, maybe? These things take time. The idea that the O'Briens, having committed themselves to dealing with this particular Molly, would decide that the only way they can save her is to send her back in time, to what will most assuredly be a lonely, painful existence and an inevitable early death, is selfishness in the guise of charity. "This turned out to be harder than we were expecting, so let's get rid of it." The only way this scenario works is if Molly was actually an animal they'd been trying inadvisably to tame. And she's not.

Really, the only point of sending Feral Molly back is so O'Brien can once again screw up the timing on the vortex, giving Feral Molly a chance to meet herself as a scared little girl, who can she can send back home through the vortex, erasing herself from existence in the process. Which makes this entire story meaningless. I've heard criticisms that ["The Visitor"](#) didn't work because the ending undid everything we'd seen, but in that case, the story was less about the plot, and more about the relationship between Sisko and Jake; how strong that relationship is, and how much impact even a fleeting connection could have on a person's life. "Time's Orphan" has no similar lessons to impart. It's very serious and well-meaning, and decently acted; there's a lovely bit where Odo lets Miles, Keiko, and Feral Molly go when he has legal cause to arrest them. But it's built on a relationship between two characters we know (Miles and Keiko) and one who barely exists (Molly, at any age), and it tells us nothing new or interesting about any of them.

Stray observations:

- There's a subplot about Worf wanting to prove to Dax that he can be a good father. As Dax has met Alexander, this poses a bit of a challenge, but he pulls it off. It's cute, and at the very least, gives Michael Dorn a chance to smile a few times.
- Molly wants to be an exobiologist when she grows up. Which is cool.
- So, what happens with the alien who was pressing charges against Feral Molly for assault? Temporal law must be baffling.
- Really, the biggest crime is how boring this is. Because it is very, very, very—oh let's move on.

"The Sound Of Her Voice" (season 6, episode 25; originally aired 6/10/1998)

In which someone is listening...

Look, I love me some high-concept. I do; one of the reasons I tend to watch sci-fi and horror shows more than traditional cop or doctor stuff is that I need a little extra to get my interest before I'm willing to commit to a series long term. But high-concept is something that needs to be earned. You

can't just attach vampires or aliens or time travel unless the premise requires those elements to be effective. Otherwise, you'll have a story working against itself, as those very parts that served to draw people like me in stand in the way of good writing and effective performances. This is a fundamental structural problem, and it's not one that *Deep Space Nine* typically struggles with. The universe it exists in was, to an extent, previously established, and most of the mythology, a few ludicrous twists aside, plays like an extension of core philosophy. Sisko's visits with the Prophets aren't always perfect, but they speak to the *Star Trek* goal of exploration, and communication. The fact that, say, the Founders are shape-shifters gives them a strong motivation, and also opens up ample opportunities for them to torment their enemies.

What I'm saying is, generally, the sci-fi trappings feel perfectly suited, and in fact integral, to the series. I'm not sure I'd say that about the ending of "The Sound Of Her Voice." It's possible to make a case that the time vortex that allows Sisko, O'Brien, and Bashir to chat with a dying shipwreck survivor even though she died years ago is justifiable. It certainly puts a spin on the episode that would not have been there if the script took a more traditional route. But I'm not convinced that spin was worth the effort. As unimpressive as "Time's Orphan" was, the vortex Molly falls into is a necessary element to tell that particular story; since the point was that Miles and Keiko had to deal with a child substantially different than the one they knew, and those changes had to happen (to their eyes) very quickly, time travel makes sense. (It doesn't mean that premise was a good enough premise to justify its existence, but if you're set on telling that story, the vortex is a reasonable solution.)

Here, though, it's almost like everyone involved decided they needed to have some kind of twist at the end, and went from there. And sure, the reveal of Lisa Cusak's desiccated corpse is a decent surprise; I don't know if the episode would've worked if they'd just showed up and rescued her and everything had had a happy ending. Yet there's something unsatisfying to all of this, to the degree that I found myself snickering at the casual "Oh yeah, the planet is surrounded by, um, energy fields that could send radio waves or whatever back through time" explanation, rather than being moved at the horror of poor Captain Cusak's plight. While there's an attempt in the final scene to make this uplifting and even inspirational, Cusak still died alone, talking to people who couldn't possibly reach her before the end. The fact that Miles, Bashir, and Sisko all find ways to use her existence as an excuse to reach out to others and heal themselves is nice, but also slightly unsettling; it was more convenient for everyone that she turn out to be a corpse, because then they can use her as a symbol.

Does that sound a bit cynical? Maybe it is. It certainly isn't anything suggested by the text, and the script (by Ron Moore, based on a story by Pam Pietroforte) does everything it can to make Cusak a vital presence. Miles first catches her distress signal while the Defiant is heading back to the station after a mission, and as it's coming from a sector with no nearby Federation presence, Sisko decides they'll need to go after her themselves. Initially they can't communicate with the signal, which is an idea with enough potential that I was slightly disappointed when Miles finally gets the right wires crossed. I'm not sure it would've been possible to manage a one-sided dialogue for the entire hour and not have it grow stale, but in a way, it would've made Cusak's agency in the story less of an issue. This was always going to be an episode more about Sisko, Bashir, and Miles than it was about some stranger we've never seen before and never will again. It might've worked better if everyone had been upfront about that from the start.

Instead, though, Miles gets things up and running, and Cusak begs (in a way that isn't artificial or forced at all, no sir) for someone to talk to her constantly, to help her feel less alone. Which is a lovely idea, and leads to scenes of various characters learning about her, and about themselves, in ways that always feel more conceptually effective than practical. It's hard to build instant rapport between characters, especially when one of them is just a voice, and "The Sound Of Her Voice" doesn't really manage to establish Cusak as an individual. I'm not sure anyone could have. Debra Wilson (who I mostly remember from *MADtv*) has a strong, empathetic vocal presence, but so much of what she says sounds designed to break through the male characters' various concerns that I found myself wondering if they twist was going to have her turn out to be some desperate to please alien. She helps Sisko deal with his relationship woes, forces Bashir to realize he needs to let himself be open with his friends and again, and gives Miles a chance to vent about his time as a soldier. It's not so egregious as to be outright offensive, but these conversations are so obviously designed to serve as a kind of half-assed therapy (an idea Cusak herself alludes to) that they lose the vitality of a real exchange. Cusak talks some about herself, but the details mostly exist to reflect our heroes' concerns back at them.

Those concerns aren't all that exciting, either. Bashir gives a big speech at Cusak's funeral about how he's learned he needs to tell everyone how much he cares about them, which is fine, I guess. It would be good to have the doctor act a bit less dour, and I'm glad the show decided to address his increased detachment from the rest of the ensemble, but I'm not sure I buy that it wouldn't have been better to see him cheered up by one of his actual friends. And Sisko's relationship concerns with Kassidy are just odd. Sure, a couple working together professionally isn't always an ideal situation, but to have Sisko suddenly turn into a grumpy, pouting twerp over it, when we've never seen him struggle with this issue in the past that I can remember, does a disservice to his character for the sake of generating a plot.

In the end, Sisko and the others do everything they can (including using up the phaser reserves for a burst of speed, something which Worf isn't happy with; but then I guess he didn't get his problems with Dax solved by a ghost), and it's too late, and everyone moves on. The fact that Cusak was long dead before they even set out on their rescue attempt should play like a sucker punch, a sick joke by the universe, but it doesn't really. It also doesn't play like the life-affirming wake up call the characters seem determined to treat it as. Ultimately, it's a person who died. Trying to make that into a lesson about how you should live your own life is understandable, but maybe not the best foundation for an episode of television.

Stray observations:

- There's a subplot about Quark trying to use Odo's relationship with Kira as a way to distract him from his duties. It's sweet, in that Odo actually catches Quark in the act but decides to let the Ferengi bartender have a win for once (because Quark helped Odo when Odo was depressed over Kira), and seeing Odo and Kira dressed up to party in 1920s Paris is nifty. Quark's willingness to tell Jake about his plans seems like a subtle reminder as to why he'll never exactly be a criminal mastermind, though.
- This has one of the lamest commercial break cliffhangers I've seen: realizing that Bashir isn't paying attention to her, Lisa fakes being attacked by a monster and we're initially supposed to believe she actually was. It's just embarrassing.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Tears Of The Prophets”/“Image In The Sand”[Zack Handlen](#)[1/30/14 10:00AM](#)**“Tears Of The Prophets” (season 6, episode 26; originally aired 6/17/1998)***In which Jadzia says her prayers...*

To be fair, Jadzia Dax’s death was probably never going to fit no matter how the writers handled it. This is, after all, a show at the end of its sixth season, a show which, in its entire time on air, has never killed off a member of its main ensemble. A few guest stars bought it, the occasional tedious recurring character was sacrificed (so long, Vedek Bareil and poor Tora Ziyal), but nobody really major, and no one whose absence seriously threatened the integrity of the series’ core. *Deep Space Nine* has had its share of significant plot shifts and political upheavals, but Sisko, Kira, Odo et al have remained present and accounted for throughout, even when they aren’t in the same place. That creates a strong sense of continuity, and if you’re going to break that kind of continuity, you need to earn the destruction. Even though Jadzia’s death was dictated by external forces (Terry Farrell decided she wanted to leave the show to do Becker), in context, it needed to have weight and meaning. The writers manage the weight, but the meaning is iffy; and, still being fair, there was probably no way to avoid that.

But as far as picking and choosing the right moment, “getting zapped by a Pah-Wraith-possessed Gul Dukat while she’s visiting a Bajoran shrine to pay respect to the Prophets for making it possible for her to have a baby” isn’t really going to make anyone’s top ten. That’s not a heroic death; it’s not even a particularly heartbreaking one. You can argue that it has a certain didn’t-see-that-coming verisimilitude with most real life fatalities, but that’s an argument that only goes so far. Getting murdered by a lizard man with red-eyes via the power of, what, magical-non-burning flame is a far cry from a heart attack of a brain aneurysm or, hell, a suicide. The whole point of reminding us that death

can come at any time is for that death to be fundamentally banal—a mystery in the “why” department that never bothers much with the “how.” Jadzia’s death is an anomaly in the history of the series, a bad luck moment in a universe where such bad luck has never affected our heroes so mortally before. What happens is striking, and memorable, because it’s unprecedented, and because it has consequences. But it’s also airless, an event of great sorrow that plays out like an old joke.

The effort to make the death more poignant before the fact—namely, Dax and Worf’s desire to have a baby—just looks forced in retrospect. There was some build up to the idea, which is smart, but having a kid in the middle of a war in which both parents are active participants is an odd choice; and even if you accept that (which, sure, why not), it just doesn’t really fit in with anything we know about Jadzia. Or Worf, although at least with Worf I can believe some idea of wanting a kid for tradition, or to finally erase Alexander’s existence from our memories once and for all. But Dax? She’s all about adventure and exploration and new experiences, and while I can completely see her wanting to have a baby eventually (pregnancy and parenthood being, in their way, an adventure with exploration and new experiences), her sudden obsession with the idea is just too programmed, too clearly established for pathos.

“Tears Of The Prophets” is an odd episode, and not just because it marks the departure of a major cast member. The plot, which has Sisko leading the first step of an invasion into Cardassian territory, sounds like standard season finale material, with its big space battle and shift in the overall paradigm; but there are strange variations throughout, as the writers attempt to move the Prophets and their war against the Pah-Wraiths to the center of the action. It doesn’t quite work. Earlier forays into mysticism were charming in a sort of “I don’t get what any of this means but it sure is wacky!” kind of way, but Gul Dukat’s decision to unearth a Bajoran artifact for a team-up is more a Lex Luthor type move than anything else. And not the good kind of Lex Luthor move, either. I mean, he breaks a statue and a glowing spirit invades his body, and his eyes go red. It’s basically *Super Friends*; all that’s missing is a laughing purple monkey.

More interesting is Sisko’s struggle when a vision warns him not to leave Bajor. The conflict between the captain’s role as a Starfleet officer and his duty as the Emissary has been a consistently compelling one since the start of the series, because it’s a question that can never have a definitive answer. There is a version of Sisko who, when forced to define himself, would have rejected the spiritual calling of the Prophets; and there’s a version of Sisko who would have given up his professional career entirely once the visions started. But neither of those are the version of Sisko we have. Our version (“The Sisko,” you might say) wants earnestly, and at times desperately, to satisfy both vocations, so that when he tells Admiral Ross about his vision, and about the bind he feels he’s in, it’s not an empty complaint. And when he decides to go on the mission anyway, the choice marks the first time I can remember that he’s explicitly gone against the will of the Prophets, which helps to make everything that follows (including Dax’s death) just a little more tragic.

Only a little, though; while Sisko’s quest to find the meaning in his life becomes more important at the start of the next season, here the various pieces don’t fit together all that well. It’s possible Sisko being on the station might have prevented Dukat from killing Dax and releasing the Pah-Wraith to taint the orb (apparently almost all the orbs, which is impressive), but the circumstances are too random and over too fast to really feel like an event which could’ve been prevented or stopped regardless of who was there to see it. The closure of the wormhole is a big deal in theory, but it’s the sort of twist whose

impact isn't immediately felt—truth be told, the wormhole hasn't really been an important part of the show in quite some time, and its loss isn't half as surprising as the loss of Deep Space Nine was last season.

Season finales don't need great shocks to succeed, and there are effective elements throughout "Tears Of The Prophets." The space battle for control of the Chin'Toka system is thrilling, and it's always great to have Garak hanging around. (I like how there's no obvious change in the way Sisko treats Garak—I'm not sure the two of them exchange a line of dialogue, which may be important in and of itself, but there aren't any obvious awkward glances or vague threats. What's done is done; and the more the show refuses to follow up on ["In The Pale Moonlight"](#) in any way, the more powerful that episode becomes.) And hey, Weyoun and Damar sparring is never not funny, as it's been too long since we've heard from either character. But this plays like the first half of a two-parter, and that's not really what it is. The premiere of season 7 is an interesting (and better, I think) hour than this, but it doesn't make "Tears Of The Prophets" more coherent in retrospect. This episode just tries to accomplish too much, and in doing so, shortchanges almost everything. There are possibilities here, but few that generate real excitement; and death, when it comes, leaves everything looking hollow by comparison.

Stray observations:

- While Jadzia's death was a disappointment (including the scene when she's goodbye to Worf, which is well-acted but weirdly unbelievable; what the hell did Dukat do to her, anyway?), the way the show handles the fallout from that death is smart. Sisko's monologue over Dax's coffin is well-written and a fine piece of acting from Brooks; I love the reminder of how often Sisko relied on Dax to help him talk through his problems.
- Wow, Dukat's plan is something. All of a sudden he's fixated on Sisko, and decides the only way to defeat his enemy is via an ancient alien force which he probably didn't even believe in a few months ago? While I accept that Dukat is unstable, and that recent events would put him at odds with the captain, the obsession is too obviously designed to be dramatically interesting. It robs the character of complexity; his goal is no longer anything for himself, but simply to lay low the nominal protagonist of the series. He's a tool, not a person, and that's disappointing.
- Bashir and Quark getting mopey because Dax wanted a baby was so damn dumb. Although it did allow Bashir a nice turn when he helped facilitate a potential pregnancy through the power of science.
- Oh, Kira and Odo have a fight about a vedek, and Odo thinks it means she wants to break up with him. She does not.
- Sisko takes his baseball with him when he leaves the station. I think that might have hit me harder than anything else in the episode.

"Image In The Sand" (season 7, episode 1; originally aired 9/30/1998)

In which Sisko decides what to do next...

What do you do when you lose your way? It's something I've been thinking about a lot lately. I'm in the middle of what you might call a crisis. Things have gotten pretty weird in my life over the course of the past year or so, for reasons that aren't worth getting into, but the weirdest, and worst, part of all of it is that I feel lost. Or stuck, or trapped, or frozen. I've had bad times before, but the last time I felt like this was in my mid-twenties, and it's a scary feeling, because it's not exactly depression or misery

(though there are elements of both). It's more waking up every day and realizing the center of my world wasn't where I thought it was. I'm not religious or even particularly spiritual, but for a long while, I could actually feel the course of my life, as though all the good bits and the bad bits were part of a long, singular track. It's a ridiculous sensation, presumptive and bordering on arrogant, but now that it's gone, I'm not sure what to do next. That's bad, the not knowing; and even worse is the growing suspicion that it was all bullshit anyway, or that if it wasn't, I made the wrong choice and ruined everything; and the future stretches out before me, unmapped, gray, and more than a little empty.

I think nearly everyone has periods in their lives when what had once seemed like a sure thing suddenly falls apart, and you're left in the darkness. If you want to be optimistic, you can say that's part of the process of growing up and maturing and becoming wise—to struggle through hard times and realize you can find your own way if you need to. If you want to be pessimistic, you can say that there never was a “way” in the first place, and what I'm experiencing right now is simply the truth in its harshest, most unmitigated form. Either way though, it's basically a universal experience, which is why Sisko's struggles in “Image In The Sand” are more than just a plot device to delay his return to Deep Space Nine. Admittedly, most of us don't have the benefit of visions from wormhole aliens to nudge us forward, but that clear sense of loss that informs Brooks' performance in the first half of the episode makes sense. Sisko is a passionate, frequently brilliant commander, a man whose livelihood depends on his ability to make bold choices when necessary, trusting in the veracity of his judgement and a fundamental faith in his own abilities. But now that the Prophets have entered his life, it's no longer a simple matter of doing what feels right. There are forces at work above and beyond him, and, for a while, they helped to guide him; but now that they're gone, the old faith no longer satisfies.

Which might be why it stings all the more that when the Prophets do re-enter his life (via a vision of Sisko digging through the sand on Tyree and finding a woman's face), it's to throw him even more off balance. Mythology-wise, I'm not sure what to make of the fact that Sarah, Sisko's real mother whom he never knew existed, once had a necklace with Ancient Bajoran written on the back, a phrase which Sisko is able to translate as “Orb of the Emissary.” The idea that Sisko's involvement with the wormhole aliens might have been something that was set into motion before he was even born is the sort of big artistic choice that writers always seem to fall for late into series when they're struggling to find new angles. It requires too much coincidence, too much connection, and it transforms one of the more fascinating elements of Sisko's arc—the fact that he got the job as Emissary apparently because he was just in the right place at the right time—and threatens to turn it into yet another Chosen One saga. I don't know where this is headed right now, and it could still work, so I'm gonna withhold judgement; but I am not optimistic.

Put aside the future plot-related aspects of the reveal, though, it actually works fairly well. Sisko comes home to Earth with his son (I'm surprised Jake was willing to go along so easily, but he does love his dad) to hang out at Joseph's restaurant, a supposedly “safe” space; sure, there were Changelings around the last time, but that got resolved, and Sisko's is pretty far away from the warfront. But three months later, after not figuring out a damn thing, the Prophets send a message that ultimately leads our hero to discovering that his “safe” life was a lie. Finding out Dad had a wife before Mom, and that this wife was your actual biological mother, would hit hard. It's melodramatic, sure, but it at least fits in with where Sisko's head is at. Everything he thought he could trust, right down to his own father, isn't quite what he thought it was, and the problem isn't going to go away if

he keeps hiding. Hell, there are even external threats to go along with the psychological ones, as it turns out there's a Bajoran cult who worship the Pah-Wraiths, and are determined to stop Sisko whatever the cost. It's odd that we haven't heard more from them in the past, but stabbing Sisko multiple times in the gut is as strong an introduction as you're likely to get, even if it is undercut by the fact that Sisko is completely fine the next time we see him. (The old ways are great and all, but one phaser blast would've solved your whole problem, bad guy.)

Back on the station, a newly promoted Kira (she's a colonel now) is dealing with the fallout from the wormhole collapse, as well as the arrival of a new Romulan contingency. The Romulan storyline introduces Cretak (Megan Cole), an apparent friend who uses honey to catch flies, with mixed results. Then there's Worf, who's in a horrible mood even for Worf; he's gotten in the habit of visiting the Vic Fontaine program, ordering Vic to sing Dax's favorite song, and then tearing the place apart. This is treated as a bad thing. It makes sense that Worf's friends would be worried that he isn't dealing with his grief well, but Bashir and Quark's horro over the damage to the holo-simulated nightclub is bizarre. It's not like that damage can't be quickly repaired; it's not even as though Worf was hurting simulated people. The attempt to make Fontaine a regular feature of the series is odd enough, but ignoring basic ideas that have been with the show since the start (ie, there's no such thing as permanent damage in a holosuite, unless the safety protocols are off for some dumb reason) isn't the way to go about it.

Still, Worf's frustration and distance are gratifying in that they refuse to let Jadzia disappear quietly. In jumping three months ahead, the season leaps over what was probably the most intense period of grieving for the characters, but it would've been a cheat to just let the loss pass without any lingering impact. Worf is upset because the way Jadzia died supposedly denies her a place in Sto Vo Kor, the Klingon heaven; but really, what he wants (and what Bashir and O'Brien want, I think, and anyone in their position would want) is to give her death meaning. Losing his wife left Worf as lost as Sisko is, only in Worf's condition, there's no way to repair the damage. She's gone, and it's up to him, without any special message from alien mystics, to find a way to move forward. So, with a little help from his friends, Worf finally gets what he wants: a dangerous mission into enemy territory to give him the chance to win a battle in Jadzia's name, and ensure her happiness in the afterlife. As solutions go, it's not elegant, but there's a practicality to the Klingon approach that's very appealing. To hell with praying—when in doubt, go kill something.

That's a luxury Sisko doesn't have. So he decides to go find a supposedly dead woman instead. "Image In The Sand," like "Tears Of The Prophet," feels incomplete, but here, that incompleteness makes thematic as well as textual sense. Our heroes are once again unmoored, through tragedy and the machinations of plot, and beginning a new season means choosing a course and setting out on it. Worf, Bashir, and O'Brien are off to the Dominion War under Martok's command, while Kira and Odo try and deal with Romulan duplicity; and Sisko, Jake, and Joseph are all off to Tyree, to try and find out more about who Sarah was, why she left Joseph when she did, and what this all has to do with the Orb of the Emissary. Oh yeah, and the new host of the Dax symbiont shows up right at the end. If you ever needed a symbol for an uncertain future, an old friend with a new face isn't a bad place to start.

Stray observations:

- Dax 2.0 is played by Nicole de Boer. I'm sure we'll get to know more about her next week.
- The Cretak storyline, in which the senator earns Kira's trust, only to seemingly violate it by storing weapons inside a hospital on a Bajoran moon, has potential. As of yet, it's hard to know just how straight Cretak is playing things (as in, how much of her politeness and seeming respect are a tool to get what she wants, and how much, if any, is actually sincere), but I'm hoping it won't be a simple "she's a villain" twist.
- O'Brien getting Worf drunk to get him to open up is a great, if lamentably short, scene. And hey, they talk about Barclay. Remember Barclay?
- Sisko is so upset that he actually physically assaults his father at one point. Bad vibes, man. Bad vibes.

SEASON SEVEN

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Shadows And Symbols”/“Afterimage”[Zack Handlen](#)[2/06/14 10:00AM](#)**“Shadows And Symbols” (season 7, episode 2; originally aired 10/7/1998)***In which Sisko makes sandcastles in the sand...*

All right: Let’s talk about Ezri Dax.

Maybe we should save this for the next episode, because Ezri doesn’t really get a storyline in “Shadows And Symbols”; the episode focuses on Sisko’s struggles to find the Orb of the Emissary, Kira’s face off against Cretak, and Worf and his crew’s effort to win a glorious victory and ensure Jadzia’s place in Sto-Vo-Kor. There’s not much room for Ezri in all that, although she does get a big scene at the start, and that scene, for better and worse, makes an impression. So let’s get this out of the way right now, because it’s weird and kind of awkward and I’m not entirely sure what to make of it.

Because why bring the character back? True, Terry Farrell’s departure wasn’t part of a planned story arc, so it could be there were symbiont plotlines the writers had in mind for season seven that they just couldn’t bear to let go of. I doubt it, though; I liked Jadzia Dax just fine, but she was, by and large, more a supporting player than a lead. This could be frustrating, as far too many Dax stories (pre-Ezri) revolved around how other characters felt about her, or about how they wanted to please her or earn her respect, as though her only real value on the show was in serving as an ideal for others to covet. It became especially problematic by the end, as Bashir and Quark started pining for lost love and Worf struggled to prove his was a good father. Either plot could’ve been fine; I’m still not a fan of Bashir’s sudden rediscovery of old feelings, but I can see how it makes sense, and Worf’s efforts were kind of

sweet. But coming so soon before the lady's death, the whole thing reeked of a writing staff incapable of putting themselves inside the head of one of their leads. The only reason Worf, Bashir, O'Brien, and Quark's quest to ensure Jadzia a place in Sto-Vo-Kor is more palatable is because she's dead, so it makes sense for the story to actually be more about them than her.

In which case, I ask again: Why bring her back, in any version at all? The whole reason she left wasn't that large, and if it was a question of needing more female leads (i.e. more than one), is this really the best way to do it? Well, maybe: The symbiont aspect of Dax is fascinating, if difficult to dramatically convey, and there is automatic value in seeing how friends of the deceased deal with a sudden, undeniable reminder of what they lost. That's especially true if that reminder comes in the form of a person with her own thoughts and needs and what have you. So I guess that also explains why the casting director felt the need to bring in an actress who isn't an exact copy of Terry Farrell, but is still sort of close, at least in terms of race, gender, hair color, and whatnot. I mean, it's great to keep that "two women" balance going, but did she have to be pale, pretty, and brunette? Nicole de Boer is shorter than Farrell, and attractive in an elfish way, as opposed to the statuesque thing Farrell had going on. But her casting speaks to a certain lack of imagination that's both inadvertently funny ("Hey, I think the photocopier is acting up again!") and a little off-putting.

Still, none of this really matters as much as the character herself, and the actress playing her. And the first impression we get here, after the initial "Gasp, it's Dax!" wears off is... forced awkwardness? An unconvincing nebbish? To be fair, Ezri isn't given a whole lot to do in this episode, and she's more interesting in "Afterimage," which has time to give her a whole storyline to herself (as well as pair her off for major scenes with one of the series' best actors). But after explaining who she is to Sisko, de Boer launches into a twitchy, self-conscious monologue in which she attempts to explain both how she came to take on the Dax symbiont and how confused she is about everything that's happening to her. It is entirely understandable and believable that such a transition would throw someone for a loop. But the monologue is such a distracting, self-conscious bit of writing that it doesn't effectively convey her fears. De Boer isn't a terrible actress, but she can't make this work. Instead of earning our sympathies, the speech draws so much attention to its own artifice that it becomes difficult to take seriously, turning her concerns into a writerly laundry list of faux-neurotic tics.

Thankfully, she more or less sits the rest of the episode out. She's merely the ineffective voice of reason as Sisko's quest for the orb drives him to wander through the desert of Tyree, dragging his family behind him. Ezri's introduction isn't the only speed bump in "Shadows And Images": Quark's sudden decision to go along on the Sto-Vo-Kor mission, and, worse, pick fights with Worf, is pretty irritating. But it does lead to a nice speech from Worf in which he talks about how much he knew they all meant to Jadzia. Sure, Quark spoils it by complaining that he was hoping to find out the dead woman called out his name in her sleep (or something), but it's fine.

Really, the whole episode is basically fine. I was a little worried after last season's finale, but while season seven has some problems baked in (the increased dependence on the mysticism of the Prophets, Vic Fontaine, whatever the hell is going on with Dukat, mixed feelings on Ezri), the show still knows how to pull together an action sequence. The cutting between Sisko, Kira, and Worf does a fine job of connecting three stories which aren't, on their surface, directly related. It all builds to a climax in which Sisko's final decision to reveal the orb becomes a triumph that passes on to each separate story. Worf's mission succeeds, destroying a Dominion shipyard via a manually induced solar burst.

Kira's refusal to surrender finally convinces Admiral Ross to step in and strong-arm Cretak into acceding to the Bajoran government. Oh, and the wormhole opens, which means that Sisko's place in Bajoran culture just got a little shinier. The only events directly connected in all of this are the orb and the re-opened wormhole, but it all feels of a piece: our heroes getting a win together, even if they aren't all in the same place.

Which is cool—wins are good, and everything that happens here is earned, even if it's in the abstract. Worf and his friends' determination to pay honor to Jadzia sees them through rough times, Kira's steel (and Odo's pessimistic, yet unquestioning, loyalty) shows once again how suited she is to leadership, and Sisko... Okay, Sisko has a vision of himself as Benny Russell trapped in a mental institution in which a seemingly friendly doctor (Casey Biggs, a.k.a. Damar without the make-up) tries to convince him to give up storytelling forever. The whole thing is an attempt by the Pah-Wraiths to keep Sisko from opening the Orb and releasing the Prophet, and it's a decent homage that neither detracts from, nor adds to, the episode it references. (If I'm reading this correctly, this was the Prophet who took over Sisko's real mother's body, only to desert her as soon as Sisko was born, which is fucking HORRIFYING)

But it's striking how much the series has shifted away from the real causes behind the Dominion War, to focus increasingly on the Prophets' mystical conflict with the Pah-Wraiths. We haven't heard directly from the Founders in what seems like ages, and while episodes do occasionally cut to Weyoun and Damar debating strategy (Damar has himself quite the drinking problem, it seems), the main dramatic thrust of last season's finale, and the start of this season, has been how Sisko gets his groove back, and how the Pah-Wraith Dukat unleashed is defeated. And as with everything relating to the Prophets, the impact of all of this is limited by its inscrutability. We can understand the basics of what just happened, but the Prophets themselves are concepts, not characters; while it's interesting to see how normal people deal with being pawns of larger forces, that interest only goes so far. Watching Sisko go half-mad as he deals with his visions and unclear messages pretty much works, and his frustration with "Sarah" in their scene together helps add a layer of grounded, understandable emotion to the sequence. Yet if this is the overall direction the series is headed for in its last season (and I can only assume it must be), I'm a little disappointed.

Still, this was pretty good, mixing the necessarily epic with just enough intimacy that the stakes never become too theoretical. Kira and Odo's romance continues to grow on me, largely because the dynamic between them feels so appropriate to both characters: Kira is the bad-ass warrior, with Odo offering constant support. Neither of them come across as smaller, or even significantly changed, in the wake of their pairing, and it's gratifying to see Kira with someone who isn't immediately slotted into a "dull father figure" role. (There's not a whole lot of physical chemistry between the two, but hey, that's an intensely subjective criticism.) As for everything else, well, we'll see how Ezri fits in on the station. I'm just glad to have Sisko back where he belongs.

Stray observations:

- Seeing Damar out of make-up is neat. He looks more normal than I was expecting. (I mean, I wasn't expecting him to look strange or anything, but it was neat.)
- Ezri is a therapist. I have reservations about this, but we'll get there.
- I like Quark, most of the time, but every so often his assholery gets too much, and the scene of Worf trying to apologize for his behavior is a good example of that.

- The clarification that Sisko's vision of Benny this time was just a challenge from the Pah-Wraith was a relief. While the guy wasn't in the best situation the last time we saw him, I'd hate to see him trapped in an asylum, scribbling on walls.
- The more I think about it, the more the reveal about Sarah disturbs me. The writers invented a character (who we never hear from) and make her a prop for the alien gods, and we literally never hear from her. Not once. Sisko is upset, but only for that scene. This casts the Prophets in an entirely new, and terrifying, light. Taking over Kira (a willing believer) for a single fight, while potentially dangerous, is understandable enough. Forcing a woman to have sex with a man, marry him, and then give birth to a son, isn't.

"Afterimage" (season 7, episode 3; originally aired 10/14/1998)

In which Ezri finds a new home...

So let's talk about Ezri Dax.

What? I—dammit. I should plan this better.

After clearing away the plot detritus lying around from last season, "Afterimage" feels like the proper beginning to the show's final year, a standalone episode that puts aside questions about time-shifting aliens and the war for some necessary character building. The story revolves around Ezri: the effect her arrival has on the people on the station who loved Jadzia, as well as her own struggle with what she wants to do next. The latter makes for some familiar "Oh, I'm not staying"/"Hey look, I'm staying" conversations, as it's doubtful that the show would go to the lengths of finding a new actress to fill Dax's shoes, and then discard her at the first convenient opportunity. But it's nice that the writers at least pretend Ezri might not want to take over the life of her previous host, and, even better, the way they choose to justify her sticking around involves multiple scenes with Garak. "Multiple scenes with Garak" will improve just about anything.

The other conflict is harder to pin down. Both the issues "Afterimage" deals with in regard to Ezri are important for establishing her place on the show. Her work with Garak is designed to convince us that she can be an effective counselor, despite her insecurity and relative inexperience. That's standard new cast member stuff, creating a space for an outsider to transition from guest star to regular. How she deals with Bashir and Worf (and, to a lesser extent, Quark) is more important to this specific situation. Most shows, when they bring someone new in, even if that someone is basically designed to replace someone who left, don't have this kind of baggage. I'm not entirely convinced of the necessity of bringing the Dax symbiont's new host back to the station, it does make for some fascinatingly loaded scenarios, particularly between Ezri and Worf.

I'm not sure how you could handle it: Your wife dies, you do your best to honor her memory and move on with your life, and then this new person shows up who has all of your wife's memories and probably some of her personality, and things get all confusing again. Ezri's weird inability to understand this is frustrating, and not entirely believable. While she's young and inexperienced, she is a Trill, and she grew up in a society that must be constantly negotiating difficult situations like the one she's in now. It's especially odd considering we already know that Trill society strictly forbids former lovers from reuniting in different hosts. (Sisko even mentions this when Ezri comes to see him, and she says, "But there's no rule against him talking to me!" as if she has no concept of his feelings

whatsoever.) Plus, if Ezri has all of Jadzia's memories, shouldn't she have a better idea of how Worf might struggle with something like this?

The show has gone out of its way to establish that Ezri is a bit up a creek with her new role, though, so maybe it's best to sort of shrug off her confusion. It's a natural effect of feeling alienated from someone she has very strong, very positive memories of. And watching Worf struggle with her presence helps to keep Ezri's arrival (and subsequent decision to stick around) from playing too much like a clumsy attempt to paper over an actress's departure. The scene between Ezri and Bashir is cute, even if I'm not sure I buy Ezri's comment that, if Worf hadn't come along, Jadzia would've married the doctor. It doesn't really fit with the Bashir/Jadzia relationship, which always played better as a "guy learning to be friend with woman he hit on a lot" arc than a romantic one. But it does lead to Worf freaking out on Bashir in the infirmary, and while that scene doesn't do much for making Worf more likable (at this point, you enjoy his stuffiness and temper or you don't), it does help clarify what's bothering him. At first it seems like a weird strain of jealousy, but the real issue here is that, for him, the process of grieving has very clearly defined steps, and the public element of those steps should be finished. He won the victory, Jadzia is in Heaven, and that should be that. Now here's this weird, friendly, small woman expecting to chat about the past.

Worf eventually comes to terms with her, but it's clear it's going to be a process. Which makes sense; grief isn't something that just disappears once you decide to face it. The episode's other plotline works towards a more definitive conclusion, and while I'm not convinced that Garak would be able to overcome his attacks of claustrophobia quite so neatly as he does here, I think the writers do enough of the necessary back and forth for his recovery to be acceptable. Psychological problems are rarely as neatly schematic as they are on television series, but Garak's distress, and the resolution of that stress, are necessary for two reasons. Those reasons matter more than accuracy of how his mental problems are handled, and I only mention it here because I do think it might've been handled a bit more deftly. At the same time, I think it worked well enough as is that I wouldn't hold that too much against the episode.

Right, I should probably explain what those reasons are. Well, the first one is what I mentioned earlier: We need to have a justifiable reason for Ezri to want to stay on the station, and ideally, that reason should be based around finding her a place within the show's ensemble. At this point in the run, every character has a basic function, and bringing in someone new isn't going to work if she doesn't fill a space we hadn't realized was empty. Dax was sort of a catch-all smart person who spent most of her work time doing, well, smart person stuff that O'Brien wasn't qualified for—scholar stuff, like translating and whatnot. (I'm mostly remembering her last few episodes here; I'm not sure her role was ever rigidly defined or anything.) It makes sense not to shove Ezri into that sort of work, because she needs a chance to be her own character. Therapist isn't a choice I'm delighted about, given the franchise's history with the occupation, but *DS9* has earned a considerable benefit of the doubt at this point. Plus, it's definitely true that the station does not have a qualified therapist aboard, at least none that we know of. While this inadvertently suggests it doesn't really need one, there is a war going on, and all the stress with the Prophets and the wormhole, so hey, it couldn't hurt.

While her work with Garak doesn't demonstrate what I'd call a tremendous amount of authority or tact, she does help him. It's not even all that unbelievable that her clumsy, sincere, Nancy Drew approach to brain-fixing works: Garak is a brilliant, incisive ex-spy, with a mind contorted by decades

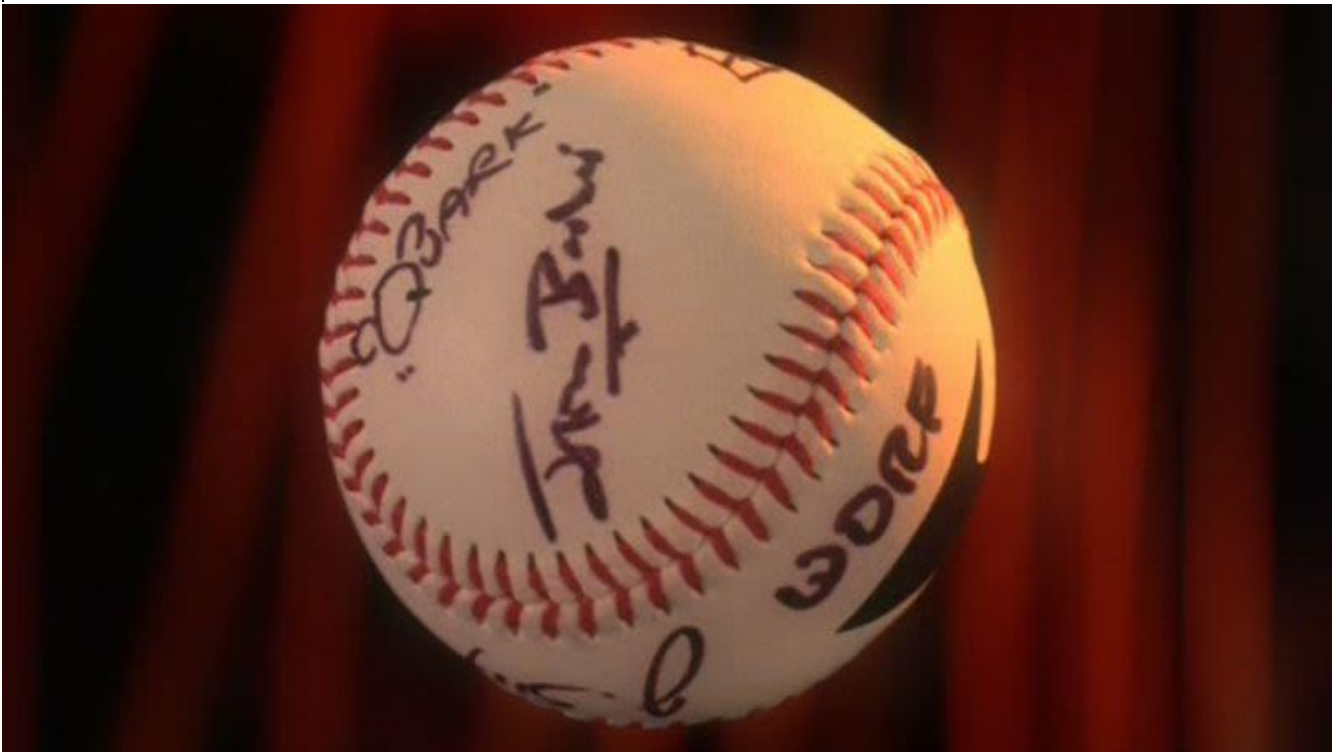
of subterfuge, trickery, and deceit. Any therapist looking to help him who showed even the slightest hint of guile would arguably get nowhere, because a large part of his training (both the stuff he received from his father and the Obsidian Order, and the stuff he's done to himself) has been designed to protect him from any kind of questioning. Ezri fumbles and runs into a few walls (psychologically speaking), but she's determined and utterly without defenses. In one of the episode's most brutal (and effective) scenes, Garak basically rips her to shreds, and all she does is stand there. That kind of vulnerability can, in the right circumstances, be utterly disarming, and while I won't say the episode entirely sells Ezri's big insight, I think it comes close enough to pretty much work. It's like Garak's relationship with Bashir, only Bashir would, eventually, have gotten angry. Ezri just takes it.

The other reason this is important is a less obvious one, given how much the episode revolves around Ezri. But whether or not the show's writers ever thought about Garak's internal conflict before deciding to use it in "Afterimages," it makes so much sense in retrospect. Garak's devotion to his home and his people has always been one of the cornerstones of his character; even when he disapproves of the direction Cardassia is headed in (which is often), he still wants what he thinks is best for his race. And right now, he's effectively turned traitor in his efforts to end the Dominion War by aiding the Federation. It's all too easy to see Garak decoding Cardassian transmissions for Starfleet and be happy that he's on the "good" side, but the revelation in this episode that his position is leading to severe panic attacks reminds us that everything he does just places him farther away from what he once was.

Garak remains one of the show's tortured, fascinating figures, and the brilliance of Andrew Robinson's performance has always been that the tortured part is hardly ever on the surface. For the most part, he's glib and sarcastic and friendly in a way that you can't quite pin down. As much as his trauma in this episode served to convince Ezri she did have a place on DS9, it also enriches our understanding of Garak. It reminds us how complicated and difficult these characters' lives will always be, even when they try to make the "right" choice. In other words, it's a *DS9* episode—and a gratifyingly solid one at that.

Stray observations:

- I'm still not quite sure what to make of Ezri's "confession" to Bashir about Jadzia's feelings for him. I suppose, were I in either of their shoes, I'd want the truth to come out, but it's just such a forced, reductive expression of their friendship. Jadzia and Bashir were good enough friends that she didn't need to be sort of in love with him for their connection to matter. As characters, I can accept that Ezri would think this necessary to share, but I don't think the writers made the right call in giving her the chance to.
- "Now get out of here before I say something unkind." Andrew Robinson is just the best.

[Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Take Me Out To The Holosuite”/“Chrysalis”](#)[Zack Handlen](#)[2/13/14 9:00AM](#)**“Take Me Out To The Holosuite” (season 7, episode 4; originally aired 10/21/1998)***In which we get to see a Fancy Dan...*

Losing sucks. This is not a revelation, but allow me to repeat with emphasis: Losing really, really sucks. And not only does it suck to put all your energy and your passion into something and fail at it, it also sucks that there’s somebody who gets to claim, with immediate and undeniable evidence, that they are your superior; that you both tried your best, and your best was not as good as theirs was. If that wasn’t bad enough, you’re supposed to act gracious about it. You must now accept your inferiority as though it were a gift.

Sisko isn’t great at this. That’s not a slight against his character—the captain is an intensely emotional, deservedly proud man, and he wouldn’t be the same Sisko if that passion didn’t occasionally slip out in less than neat and tidy ways. And in his defense, the source of his wounded pride in “Take Me Out To The Holosuite” is aggravating enough to drive anyone nuts. Solok (Gregory Wagrowski), the Vulcan captain of a Federation ship docked at Deep Space 9 for repairs, has a history with Sisko. When they were both cadets together, Solok’s arrogance inspired a drunk Sisko to challenge him to a wrestling match, which Sisko lost—badly. In the years since then, Solok has taken every possible chance to rub his victory in Sisko’s face, using Sisko’s “emotional” reactions as proof of his theory that Vulcan stoicism is superior to humans and their sloppy, petty feelings. With his arrival at the station, he’s brought a new challenge: a baseball game in the holosuite, Solok’s team against Sisko’s.

So Sisko has a chip on his shoulder, and now he's finally going to get a second chance to prove who's the better, um, humanoid. "Holosuite" is corny as hell and all the more fun for it, and part of why the episode works is that it sets up one expectation, only to deliver on another. We're not privy to the reasons behind the Sisko/Solok feud at first. There's clear tension in their initial scene together, but that tension goes unexplained until later in the hour, when Kasidy basically forces Sisko to tell her what's going on. (I really like Kasidy. I may have expressed ambivalence about her before, but I like her a lot, and wish the writers could give her more to do.) As a general rule, it's not a great idea to hide the motivation behind a character's actions from the audience for an extended period of time. But it can work well in the context of an hour of television, especially if, as in this case, it sets us up with certain assumptions, and in doing so manages to make the truth all the more resonant.

What I'm getting at is that for a while, the episode plays like an old-fashioned underdog story. You've got a determined coach (Sisko) saddled with a group of inexperienced players facing an opposing team of greater resources and physical strength (as Kasidy reminds Sisko, the Vulcans are three times stronger than a human, and while not all of Sisko's team is human, you can still feel the difference). You've got a ragbag team of misfits studying to figure out the rules of an archaic game. You've even got the hopeless loser who can't seem to do anything right, who you just know will come through in the clutch. Rom—good old well-meaning, kind-hearted, eager to please Rom—is so bad at baseball he makes me look like Babe Ruth. (Context: I hated playing Little League because I was terrified every time I had to go up to bat.) Every underdog story has its biggest loser, and that's always the guy (or gal) we root for the most.

Until Sisko kicks him off the team and throws everything to hell.

What I like about that scene is that it's not immediately, definitively clear that Sisko's making a bad call. Because, again, Rom is freaking terrible. He can't field and he can't bat, and hey, if this game is so important to Sisko, it's not asking that much to have the Ferengi sit this one out. The problem lies in the way Sisko rejects him. After watching Rom fail at batting for presumably the umpteenth time, Sisko storms over and excoriates him in front of the entire team. Even if you can justify not having Rom play, there's no reason to make him feel even worse about it than he clearly already does. Afterwards, the other team-members show solidarity for Rom and offer to quit in his name, but Rom won't hear of it, because he's just that damn nice. But all of this isn't to remind us who Rom is—it's to start the shift from "underdog triumph" over to something a little more grown-up.

In yelling at Rom, Sisko loses his temper, which means he's taking what is, at heart, a very silly game far more seriously than he needs to. The real arc of the episode isn't the captain pulling everyone together and overcoming insurmountable odds. It's Sisko realizing that sometimes the only way to win is to accept losing and not give a damn about it. There was no way in hell the Niners (the name of the DS9 team; it's embarrassing how long it took me to get where that came from) were going to beat Solok's team. Apart from Jake, Sisko, and possibly Kasidy, none of them had ever played baseball before, or even understood the basics of the game, while Solok and his crew have had ample opportunity for training. More than that, from what we know of Solok, it's obvious that the only way he would enter into a contest like this at all is if he was certain he would win.

Yet he does lose; just not in the way you'd expect. Trying to subvert the underdog scenario is tricky because you risk disappointing your audience, regardless of their savvy or the purity of your

intentions—the desire to see the losers win is so ingrained in us that it’s hard to be satisfied when they don’t, even when the lesson is there’s more to life than winning. “Holosuite” manages to have it both ways. For a more traditional triumph, there’s Rom finally getting his chance at bat. He helps bring a run in by accident, when O’Brien (who coaches the team after Sisko gets himself kicked out for poking Odo, the umpire, in the chest) realizes that the best chance they have for success is a bunt; Rom doesn’t understand the symbols everyone throws at him, but he does manage to stick his bat out just far enough to knock the ball forward a few feet. It’s dopey, but sweet, and the immediate outpouring of support from the rest of the team makes it as big a victory as Robert Redford smashing the stadium lights out in *The Natural*.

But Rom’s big play only results in a single runner (Nog) getting to home plate. The Vulcans still win the game by a landslide (10-1, unless I missed a shot of the scoreboard at the end). That’s where the other triumph comes in, the one that really counts: Sisko realizes that the only way he’ll ever “beat” Solok is to learn how to lose well. It’s satisfying to see someone accepting that failure is a part of life (finding joy in that knowledge all the while), because it’s such an unexpected resolution for this kind of story. For any kind of story, really. It’s a little childish maybe, right down to the way everyone rubs their happiness in Solok’s face at the end, but that fits. Sometimes it’s important to remember the reason you fell in love with a game isn’t to win or to crush your enemies, but for the joy of play and teamwork. Y’know, kid stuff. I’m sure next week we’ll get back to death and despair and moral complexity, but every once in a while, it’s nice to remember what you’re fighting for.

Stray observations:

- The adorability levels are off the charts for this, but I think my favorite moment might be Kira catching sight of Odo practicing his umpire calls.
- Ezri’s big catch is cute as well. And those uniforms. And those hats! I’m a sucker for episodes that manage to sell the family vibe of an ensemble without overselling it, and I think this one fits that category quite well. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* tried that sort of thing from time to time, with moderate success, but this hour works better than, say, “Data’s Day,” because the corniness of the sweeter moments is balanced by Sisko’s very real, and often ungenerous, anger. He comes around in the end, but no one pretends as though human beings can’t be jerks sometimes, and that makes the kindness more valuable.
- I got a little choked up when they handed Sisko the game ball signed by the team. I’m not even sure why.

“Chrysalis” (season 7, episode 5; originally aired 10/28/1998)

In which Bashir falls for Pygmalion...

As far as returning guest characters go, I’m not sure I would’ve told you I was eager to see Jack, Patrick, Lauren, and Sarina again before watching this episode. [“Statistical Probabilities”](#) was a solid episode, and, so far as I can remember (I could go back and check my review, but pfffffft), I enjoyed the twitchy, super-genius quartet for what they were: decently drawn and well-acted individuals who were mostly valuable as symbols of Bashir’s fears for himself. Their genetic modifications gave them incredible gifts, but also left them incapable of functioning in a normal society. The good doctor had escaped this fate, but after having been forced to reveal his true nature to his colleagues, well, he was feeling a little isolated. “Statistical Probabilities,” then, was a good chance to example that isolation, and also to let it go. Just because Bashir is super smart and fast and what have you, doesn’t mean

O'Brien and the others like him any less. And just because Jack and friends aren't entirely sane, doesn't mean they can't be useful or made to feel necessary in the world.

Bringing them back, though, means running a risk of diminishing returns, as the writers will either need to find a new angle to explore, or else just repeat the familiar routines. For Jack, Patrick, and Lauren, we get the latter in "Chrysalis." Jack is still tightly wound, eager to take offense, and super insecure; Lauren is still obsessed with seducing men (she fixates on Nog this time, although she never does anything about it, thank God); and Patrick is still nervous and childlike. Impressively, none of these characters ever wear out their welcome, and by the end, I was almost wishing we could've spent a little more time with them. Still, if the story had actually just been another iteration of "the smart crazy people are so weird and smart" that we got last time, it wouldn't have been worth the time. As likable as they are, these three are inherently limited. It's part of what makes them who they are.

Thankfully, "Chrysalis" isn't about Jack, Lauren, or Patrick. It's about Sarina, and it's also about Bashir, who is once again feeling some feelings about being alone. This time, instead of being isolated because of his genetic enhancements, Julian is blue because he's flying solo through a station full of couples. (Admittedly, there's still Worf, Quark, Sisko, and Ezri to hang out with, but when you're feeling lonely, it's hard to remember your options.) As someone in his mid-30s (dear God), I found this easy to understand, but then, I think most people could relate to it. For all the encouraging things people tell you, and for all the reasons you're supposed to be fine on your own, realizing that many of your closest friends have a kind of life you can only aspire to is kind of unshakable. Being single as an adult is difficult partly because of all the nice, romantic bits about couplehood you're missing out on, but also because of the basic stuff like having someone to come home to. A relationship means that when you believe you have a place in the world, there's someone else who believes the same thing. It's not awful to not have that, and there are definite advantages to bachelorhood, but it gets cold sometimes.

So Bashir is in a vulnerable place when the crazies arrive. Jack, Patrick, and Lauren got their hands on Starfleet uniforms and bluffed their way to the station because they'd heard Bashir had worked out a potential treatment for Sarina's catatonia. And there's your plot: Bashir cures Sarina, she turns into a real-live girl, and Bashir falls in love with her. For a while, I was worried the episode was going to work out like *Awakenings*, with Sarina's newly restored consciousness gradually cracking as Bashir's miracle cure fails for some mysterious, irreversible reason, and there are a few feints in that direction. But instead, "Chrysalis" goes a less tragic, more character-driven route. In its way, it has the same path of "Take Me Out To The Holosuite," with a protagonist initially blinded by his emotional needs ultimately realizing the truth before it's too late. The main difference is that, for Bashir, doing the right thing doesn't mean a big cheering party at Quark's. It means letting go of someone who briefly seemed to promise an answer to everything.

The danger in telling a story like this is that since so much of it is seen from Bashir's perspective—and since Bashir is someone we know quite well—it would be easy for Sarina to disappear. It's important that she doesn't; the narrative is about realizing how important it is for her to have a chance to forge her own identity without feeling burdened by obligations towards others. While the Sarina we (briefly) know doesn't have a lot of monologues about her childhood or her dreams, she is distinct, and there are glimpses throughout of the kind of person she might eventually be. I especially like the scene where she briefly, but accurately, sketches out the personalities of Bashir's friends. This shows an insight, but even more tellingly, it shows she's kind; all of her comments are generous, and while she's

clearly trying to please Bashir, that kindness fits in with everything else we learn about her. Faith Salie does a convincing job at playing someone who is both hopeful and deeply uncertain, and she's subtle enough about it that's initially easy to believe just what Bashir believes: that she's in love with him. She isn't, though. On some level she is, but he just saved her from a lifetime of quiet sitting. Her feelings are confused for a variety of reasons, and rushing into a close relationship with her savior isn't healthy for either of them. There's a clever fake-out when Sarina seems overwhelmed by the noise at Quark's, and I thought to myself, "Ah, she's slipping back to her old self." But even though she does relapse, it's not because the treatment isn't working; it's because she's unable to give Bashir what he wants, and what she feels she owes him.

Losing love is awful, but losing a love you never had to begin with is terrible in its own way. Something that was of the utmost importance has suddenly ceased to exist; only it never existed in the first place. You misinterpreted conversations, signals, signs, and each time you did, you felt more secure in your presumption, more convinced that your doubts would fade and that your instincts would prove correct. Watching Bashir babble on to O'Brien about how much in love he is, it's hard not to wince. All the signs are there. The more you need something, the more willing you are to believe that you've found it. O'Brien tries patiently, kindly, to wake him up, but he can't. That's the hell of the thing, really; you lock yourself in, and you're stuck until something shakes you loose, usually with a great and sudden force.

Thankfully, Bashir comes to his senses before it's too late, and it all ends happily enough: The good doctor is still sad and alone, but at least he didn't turn into a controlling monster, and at least he has the benefit of knowing he helped someone. (It's still a little creepy that he was so eager to jump into a relationship with a patient, but since Sarina was uncommunicative for most of her time in his care, and since he does make it a point of passing her on to another doctor when things get serious, I think it's okay. Definitely a warning sign, though.) O'Brien is still there waiting to hang out as soon as Bashir is ready to play again. This isn't the first time the show has done the "I'm totally in love with this person, oh here is a circumstance that means I will never see them again," but "Chrysalis" stands out because the "circumstance" is just the acknowledgement that most of the time, love isn't something that happens when you need it to happen. The perfect answer to all your questions is the one you can trust the least. That's a hard truth, but don't worry; you'll have plenty of chances to learn it.

Stray observations:

- I like how, in the background of all of this, Jack and the others are still working to save the universe from a basically irrelevant threat. (The "improvised" singing they do with the newly restored Sarina is also nifty.)
- Ezri doesn't get a lot to do this week, but her conversation with Bashir (in which she decides he's trying to punish himself and does her best to help) was fun.
- The ensemble takes a backseat this hour, for understandable reasons (Bashir needs to feel at least a little isolated for the story to work), but the brief glimpses we get of them are yet another reminder of how likable everyone is. Both these episodes offer a place that makes you want to come back for more.

[Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "Treachery, Faith, And The Great River"/"Once More Unto The Breach"](#)[Zack Handlen](#)[2/20/14 10:00AM](#)**"Treachery, Faith and the Great River" (season 7, episode 6; originally aired 11/2/1998)***In which they can never take Weyoun's freedom, because it doesn't exist...*

I recently re-watched *Braveheart* for the first time in, oh, probably a decade or so. I've never had a huge emotional attachment to the film, and seeing it again didn't change that, although the near-constant hero worship and awe with which the script regards its central figure is fascinating in light of the dissolution of Mel Gibson's star image. (The actor's habit of staring grimly forward to express shock, horror, or rage now makes you wonder just what the hell he's struggling to hold back.) But what struck me, especially in light of seeing this week's first episode, is how much effort the movie expends to make sure we fucking hate the English. It's not just that Edward I (Patrick McGeehan at his most peevish) is a despicable lying bastard, or that his son is (homophobia alert!) ineffectual and foolish; it's that every Englishman Wallace and his men fight have as much humanity as the walking targets in a Call Of Duty game. This is by design; we're meant to cheer when the heroes trap a group of soldiers in a shed and burn them alive, partly because those soldiers were themselves trying to trap Wallace, and partly because hey, this is just too awesome to worry about the ugliness of war. There's plenty of bracing violence in the film, but there's never any sense of the villains as being anything more than obstacles which need to be bludgeoned, stabbed, and flambeed. Which makes sense; it's hard to get excited about a battle when you're too busy being sad and worried for everyone.

All of which is why I found "Treachery, Faith and the Great River" such a pleasure to watch. It's not as though *DS9* hasn't already done a good job of showing both sides of the Dominion War; one of the strengths of the conflict has always been the writers ability to provide clear, and even sympathetic,

motivation for both sides without ever losing sight of the “good” and the “bad.” (It’s a trick Ron Moore would pull off equally well with the humans and the Cylons on *Battlestar Galactica*.) We know what drives the Founders, and how they make their decisions based on decades, maybe even centuries, of abuse and assault by the solids. That doesn’t make their desire to dominate the universe worth rooting for, or even remotely excusable, but it does make them more than just stock monsters waiting for their comeuppance. Same with the Jem’Hadar: fierce, brutal warriors though they may be, they also have an unshakable sense of honor, and their genetically engineered drug addiction means they are as much slaves as they are fearsome enemies.

The same could be said of the Vorta; while they lack the Jem’Hadar’s need for ketracel white, they have been extensively designed and shaped by the Founders into a race of subservient, obsequious toadies, master negotiators with a regal contempt for any race they consider below themselves (which is nearly all of them), but a inbred adoration for their masters. But a few stray moments aside, up until this episode the Vorta have been the easiest of the lot to hate, because we’ve been given little reason to do otherwise. Bureaucrats are always easier to hate, as they do everything in their power to keep their hands from getting dirty, which robs them of even the minor dignity of an opposing military force. And everything we’ve seen so far of the Vorta has not painted a flattering picture, as Weyoun and his cohorts have proven themselves willing time and again to do anything to protect themselves. They’re crafty cowards, and there are few fictional archetypes more inherently despicable.

I’m not sure “Treachery” reverse this, as Weyoun Six, the clone who decides to defect when he realizes the war is wrong, is labeled by his successor as “malfunctioning;” and while Weyoun Seven isn’t to be trusted, it doesn’t really put make the Vorta heroes when their most noble representative to date can be marked down as a kind of genetic mistake. Still, seeing a figure as traditionally slimy and unctuous as Weyoun turned into a martyr for a doomed cause suggests the possibility that the Vorta aren’t as one-sided as they seem to be. In his conversations with Odo, Weyoun Six shows fear, self-loathing, and reverence, even going so far as to have a nightmare about capture while the two are attempting to flee Cardassian space; none of which makes him perfect, but it does make him more complicated, and, given that he sacrifices himself in the end to save Odo’s life, even noble. Combs, given the chance to play someone legitimately likable for a change, rises to the occasional admirably. That final scene between the two of them, as Weyoun Six begs Odo to bless him (which Odo reluctantly does) is moving to a degree I would not have thought possible, given the characters involved. (I mean, I don’t have a hard time getting worked up about Odo, but Weyoun?) It reminds us again of the complexity of the situation, and how even if the Federation wins—which seems pretty likely at this point—it won’t be smiles for everyone.

Weyoun Six tells Odo a story about how his people came to be; how the Vorta were once a timid, weak race long ago, but they protected a Changeling when the solids chased the creature into their forest, and as a reward, the Changelings transformed Vorta into the powerful beings they are today. Odo suggests that this story means the Founders once had great good and kindness in them, and Weyoun Six (inevitably) agrees, but I found the history lesson deeply unsettling. While the Vorta may believe themselves better off now, no longer stuck in the trees and terrified of predators, they are still slaves to a power that will use them and discard them without the slightest remorse.

As well, the Founders have designed them in such a way as to rob much of the joy from their lives; we already know that Vorta don’t have any real aesthetic sense, but Weyoun Six also explains to Odo that

they can't really taste much of anything as well, and their favorite food is still the berries they once ate on their home world, a constant reminder what their origins. (I wonder if it's subtle sign of Weyoun Six's "malfunction" that he eagerly samples all of the food from the runabout's replicator. He does it because he enjoys the textures, and a normal Vorta should really only get pleasure from service.) It's possible the ancient Vorta might have died out, as helpless as they were. Or maybe they would've evolved to something greater on their own. Regardless, the Founders' gift isn't really a gift at all; they simply found a potential tool and decided to take advantage of it. Weyoun Six's unflinching adoration of Odo doesn't make that face any easier to take.

The Weyoun Six/Odo scenes are the highlight of the episode, but they aren't the only storyline we follow: there's also Weyoun Seven and Damar back on Cardassia Prime, and the discovery that Weyoun Five (the Weyoun that Six was activated to replace) was killed in a suspicious "transporter accident" which Damar just happened to avoid. The implication being that Damar is intent on killing the Vorta, whether for bitterness or boredom or some other, more complicated reason. It's a fun development that adds a nice edge to their scenes together (especially Damar's repeated insistence that Weyoun even have a drink). Far more important is the brief return of the Female Changeling, whose ragged appearance confirms the most vital piece of information Weyoun Six is able to pass on to Odo before he kills himself: the Changelings are sick, and perhaps even dying. No one knows why, although given that Odo himself is fine, it must have something to do with the Great Link.

This leads to some soul-searching for Odo, and a good conversation between him and Kira about gods and faith and so forth. (Although can you really call what the Vorta have "faith"? It's hardwired into their brain. There's no choice involved). While the discovery of the Founders' illness seems like the sort of thing that deserves an episode of its own, it's still thrilling to get back to what's presumably the main business of the season: getting to the end of the war, and witnessing the resolution of a storyline that encompasses the entire run of the series. (The War is comparatively recent, but Odo and the Prophets have been there from the beginning.) Which isn't to criticize the structure of mixing in standalones with serialized episodes; too much serialization, especially in a season over twenty hours long, can lead to padding and awkward storytelling. But while I enjoyed last week quite a bit, the reminder of what's going on in the background of all that interpersonal drama is refreshing. It's especially refreshing when handled this well: Odo wrestles with his identity; Damar and Weyoun almost go against the Founders; and we learn that the Vorta may be irritating and generally despicable, but there is some soul left in them, despite their masters' best efforts.

Stray observations:

- While the B story with O'Brien and Nog is a bit less dramatic (and also somewhat familiar), it's still a lot of fun, with O'Brien growing more and more worried as Nog works through an increasingly elaborate series of trades to get a special part they need to fix the Defiant. The best trade is probably the temporary loss of Sisko's desk to an officer who likes to take pictures of himself sitting behind famous captains' desks; it's just such a weirdly familiar idea of hero worship, the sort of thing the show usually doesn't really get into. Everything works out in the end, and while there wasn't any real doubt that it would, Nog's victory is pretty sweet anyway. The whole arc is just a lot of fun, and helps to balance the more serious A story featuring Odo.
- It's interesting how Odo spends the escape run with Weyoun Six depending on the Vorta for help, whether he wants to or not. First Weyoun Six shows him how to shoot down a Jem'Hadar cruiser, and later, after Odo's (quite clever) attempt to hide them in an ice cluster fails, the

Vorta decides to sacrifice himself. None of which reflects badly on Odo, and it's really more indicative of how in over his head he is in this situation (which isn't his fault, since Weyoun Six lied to get him there), but that is what the Vorta do for Changelings.

- The Vorta have a chip in their heads that lets them "self-terminate" as the saying goes; it's supposed to be quick and painless, but as Weyoun Six discovers, it is not.
- Odo massaging Kira in the cold open wasn't something I really need to see again. Neat idea, though.
- "Why be a god if there's no one to worship you?"

"Once More Unto The Breach" (season 7, episode 7; originally aired 11/11/1998)

In which an old friend gets a good death...

So, at the end of *Braveheart*—spoiler alert!—the hero gets beaten, hanged, and disemboweled. It's a weird scene, especially once you take Gibson's masochistic cinematic history; whatever drives him, he has a tendency to pick projects which end up with him getting beaten half to hell, which suggests all sorts of uncomfortable (and sort of sad, if you can feel pity for a bigoted rich man) psychological conflicts raging inside his head. But even apart from that, it's just brutal and eerie and almost valedictory, as though the whole sordid scene was just an excuse for Wallace to prove for eternity his love for his land and its people. I balk at this sort of thing, because I balk at any suggestion that extensive, agonizing torture can be endured through strength of character, but I get why it's there. Whether or not I agree with the intention, *Braveheart* is all about creating a legend, and a legend needs a legendary ending. Wallace might have said he dreamed of raising a family and living off the land, but what he really needed was to go out bloody and defiant, a conclusion that offered him one last chance to demonstrate his inestimable worth.

What happens if you live past that moment, though? What happens to old warriors as their body begins to fail them; as their instincts dull and memory fades, and the next generation takes its place in the world. Nothing good, I'm sure; no one wants to see a legend shitting itself and forgetting where he left his teeth. Things aren't quite so bad for Kor (John Colicos), but they aren't good, and when he arrives on the station to ask Worf for help, it's hard not to see how desperate he is. Because warriors aren't really supposed to get old. Kor's pride, ambition, and ruthlessness held him in good stead in the prime of his life, but that same ruthlessness also made him any number of enemies; and now that his faculties and his luck are no longer what they used to be, those enemies are more than willing to shut him out. He's a hero who doesn't have the resources to go heroing anymore, and who has been forced to sit on the sidelines for what's probably the last great campaign in his life, the Dominion War.

That's an awkward position for a man (or Klingon) of action to be in. And it gets more awkward when Worf, being the loyal friend that he is, goes to Martok for help, and finds that Martok really, really, really, really does not like Kor. As is so often the case with this show, it's a conflict that allows you to invest in both sides without suggesting an obvious "right" answer. Of the two, Martok is the more immediately sympathetic. It turns out that Kor rejected Martok's application for officer school (or whatever badass word the Klingons have for that) years ago because Martok wasn't of a noble bloodline. Because of this rejection, Martok was forced to toil as a civilian for years before finally demonstrating his value in combat and earning his command. Unfortunately, his father, whose dream it was to see Martok as an officer, died before Martok finally achieved his goal. Now Martok

understandably blames Kor for those wasted years; and there's a sense as well that Kor has come to represent all of Martok's doubts about his own abilities, and about his place in the Empire.

All of which paints Kor in a bad light, and he doesn't come off much better when Worf confronts him with what he's learned, and Kor can't even remember rejecting Martok's application. He doesn't even pretend that he'd be fine with having a commoner rise in the ranks, which is the sort of old-fashioned bigotry that's possible to tolerate (in that he's out of power and will die soon), but not really something to root for. Yet "Once More Unto The Breach" does find ways to make Kor sympathetic. He's a boaster and full of himself, basking in the adoration of Martok's crew like a lizard taking in the sun, but he's also vulnerable, and utterly alone; Worf helps as he can, but Worf isn't exactly the comrade you visit if you want to get drunk and roar about old times. Kor is a dinosaur in a universe that is doing its level best to push him out the door, but his options for exiting are limited. Either he goes out in a blaze of glory, or he gets relegated to a desk job on the Klingon Empire, an old joke to die in his bed of natural causes. That's not a fitting end for any legend, and whatever his faults, it's not hard to want better for this one.

Even with Worf's help, Kor nearly ruins everything. There are a few moments of senility early in the episode, but the true crisis comes during an assault on a Cardassian shipyard (or a weapons' facility; something valuable to the war effort, anyway). When Martok and Worf are momentarily incapacitated during the battle, Kor seizes the moment to take command, and the results are disastrous. He grows confused, and overwhelmed by the adrenaline mistakes the present day fight for a battle from his past. Their forces thoroughly routed, Martok and the others are forced to retreat, and in the aftermath, Kor is ridiculed for his lapse. The brief celebrity he'd held among the crew is destroyed, and Martok finally gets a chance to humiliate the man he's loathed for so many years. It's all bitter and ugly and stupid, in ways that make perfect sense, and it wasn't hard to imagine myself in either characters' shoes. Martok is the most perfectly "Klingon" Klingon this show has ever produced—passionate, loyal, quick to take offense but (generally) just as quick to forgive, and overall just a enjoyable, life-loving kind of guy. Here, we see him at his absolute worst, and it's a credit to the writing and the actor that the pettiness of his mockery of Kor doesn't play as forced conflict, or out of character. (The later scene where Martok complains to Worf that he finally got his revenge and didn't enjoy it at all is also excellent.)

Inevitably, a situation develops requiring someone (seven someones, actually) to make the ultimate sacrifice, and while Worf is initially tasked with the duty—it's his plan—Kor finds out about it, knocks Worf out with a hypnospray and takes the job on himself. (Kor learns what's happening from Darok, Martok's older assistant, as Darok is himself an old man and has respect for the old ways; what's really impressive here is how well the actor, Neil Vipond, and Ron Moore's script manage to convey the sense of Darok as a familiar, lived in character, despite him only being introduced, and only ever appearing, in this episode.) So Kor gets the good death that he wants, and Martok gets a chance to find some peace with this one-time oppressor; and we get a reminder that Klingon rituals for the dead involve drinking and look like a hell of a good time.

"Once More Unto The Breach" is an episode that often threatens to become unpleasant to watch; between Kor's forgetfulness and Martok's rage, half the scenes in the first act play like set ups to a lot of incredibly awkward embarrassment and slow soiling humiliation. Yet the story avoids the pitfalls of dwelling too much in obvious suffering. The two central figures are shown at their worst and at their

best, and in the end, they're both allowed their honor. Also, Kor blows up saving the day, which is the best end he could've hoped for.

Stray observations:

- The B-plot here is so slight that it barely exists; given what we do get, that's probably for the best. Quark overhears Ezri and Kira talking, and mistakenly thinks that Ezri is planning on getting back together with Worf. He tells her she shouldn't, she explains that she has no interest in Worf in that way anymore, and then kisses Quark on the cheek for being so nice. This whole "Quark is in love with Dax" runner really needs to die a quick death, although it's nice to know she deal with him readily if she needs to.
- Wow, Worf. An old man knocks you out with a hypnospray. That is damn impressive.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "The Siege Of AR-558"/"Covenant"[Zack Handlen](#)[2/27/14 10:00AM](#)**"The Siege Of AR-558" (Season 7, episode 8; originally aired 11/18/1998)***In which we meet some names...*

War is hell. Everyone remember that? War is a definitely no good awful very bad thing. There might be people who would disagree with this; I am not one of them. And for the most part, I appreciate the writers of *Deep Space Nine*'s commitment to making sure we never forget that no one is having fun during the Dominion War. After a brief, weird scene in Vic Fontaine's holo-club (Rom is auditioning to be Vic's opening act, because apparently Rom is an idiot who doesn't realize he's not a hologram, and Vic doesn't explain the problem until after Rom sings a terrible version of "The Lady Is A Tramp"), we find Sisko once again reading through the latest casualty reports, explaining that he feels it's the least he can do; trying to honor the sacrifices of the dead by brushing against their memory. And there you basically have the theme of the whole episode: even as we focus on Sisko and the rest of the regular ensemble, Starfleet personnel are dying, every day, every hour. Sometimes it's necessary to check in with the grunts in the trenches and remember that all this grand adventure comes at a dirty, irrevocable cost.

"The Siege Of AR-558" works well enough. But there's something a little familiar about it; *DS9* hasn't done a ton of stories set on the front lines, but even so, there are only so many times we can wallow in the muck of battle before there needs to be a new angle. I don't want to stress this criticism too much, because there's enough good here to make up for the familiarity, and because I don't automatically object to a show tackling the same theme multiple times, especially not if the theme is as inherently powerful as this one is. Yet the familiarity remains. While the tones are vastly different, it

reminds me of [the Nog subplot](#) from last week, the trading storyline that the show has used before. Season seven has been better than I was expecting so far (and, bad spots aside, it's more consistent than *Star Trek: The Next Generation's* final season), but it's not hard to spot signs of a writers' room that's gotten a little comfortable with old routines.

That said, once things get up and running, this turns into a grim but lively adventure story, complete with debate over the ethics of war, a dude who wears ketracel white vials around his neck as trophies (in a way that's supposed to bring to mind American soldiers wearing ears from the Vietcong, but fails to be even remotely as disturbing, and mostly just comes off as silly), and subspace mines, which appear without warning thanks to the miracle of terrifying science. While not afraid to get heavy, the episode is smart enough to recognize that the constant threat of a Jem'Hadar attack, combined with the Starfleet soldiers' exhaustion and morale problems, is as much a good story hook as it is a piece of social commentary. You never forget how miserable and unhappy and stressed everyone is, but that doesn't make it less thrilling when Ezri and Kellin (Bill Mumy, former child actor and occasional adult guest star) figure out how to uncover the hundreds of mines floating around the complex; and while half of the characters we meet for the first time here end up dead, it's still satisfying when Sisko decides to use the newly uncovered mines against the oncoming enemy.

As for Quark having to kill to protect his wounded nephew, well, I'm not sure if "satisfying" is the word I'd use. It depends on how you read his arc. Quark can be a deeply irritating character, as he's the only one on the show routinely at odds with just about everyone. In the right (or wrong) situation, he becomes the dissonant voice in a sea of harmony, refusing to back down or compromise even as his relentless criticism and complaints infuriate everyone around him. Sometimes this can seem forced, like his constant whinging during Worf's quest to get Jadzia her rightful place in Sto-Vo-Kor. But his criticisms of war, and his frustration over Nog's unquestioning love of soldiering, are more complex than simple selfishness. Again and again, he raises issues which deserve to be raised, and while I won't argue his doubts and anger is "right," exactly, the episode makes the smart move of never entirely coming down on one side or the other. He tells Nog that the Ferengi would've settled the conflict with the Dominion through negotiation, and saved countless lives. That sounds like cowardice (an accusation I doubt Quark would care to deny), and who knows if it would be possible to come to an arrangement that both parties could live with, but there is something about the Federation's do-or-die approach that deserves to be questioned. Quark's assessment of humanity—we're nice when we're well fed and comfortable, but take our toys away and we turn mean in a hurry—is hard to argue with. The fact that even Quark is willing to kill to protect his own is an acknowledgement that anyone will resort to violence under the right circumstances; whether or not you take that as a criticism of Quark's anti-war stance, an affirmation of it, or simply a way to show that war is a situation which inevitably forces people to make impossible choices, is up to you.

I like that. While "Siege" is never very subtle about its main point (ignoring the aside at Vic's, the episode begins and ends with Sisko talking about the casualty reports), it withholds judgement on everything else, which makes sense; if we're supposed to be commemorating all those faceless hundreds who die each week, it's better to see them as individuals rather than talking points. While the various characters Sisko, Bashir, and Ezri meet aren't incredibly complex, none of them are set up to prove anything, or punished for their failings. Vargas (Raymond Cruz, aka Tuco from *Breaking Bad*, all sweaty, angry desperation) is unhinged, raging, and terrified. But he gets a scene with Bashir when we learn how much all the death has cost him, and how much effort it's taking for him to hold on even

as much as he has. Reese (Patrick Kilpatrick), the guy with the trophy necklace, is introduced as a badass, someone Nog instantly hero-worships; but instead of him dying to teach Nog a lesson about the futility of “heroes” in war, he lives, and turns out to be a pretty decent guy. And Lt. Larkin (Annette Helde), the woman in charge of the bunch, is determined, forceful, and competent. Her death is maybe the most surprising, because it just happens, without any major drama—Nog and Reese are too busy trying to survive to mourn her.

That’s really the episode’s biggest strength: while there’s a pall of sadness and strain hanging over the episode, there’s never really time to process any of this—the grief never goes away, and while the names change, the end result is a constant, so there’s no chance to move on. Quark snipes at Sisko over Nog’s injury, and Sisko shouts back that he cares about every soldier under his command, and that’s an impossible position. It’s necessary, but it would drive you insane. The *Trek* franchise has always been about smart people doing their best in tight spots, but one of the lessons of *Deep Space Nine* has always been that this isn’t always going to be enough. There are situations which no degree of compassion, intelligence, and courage can resolve. The unit stationed on AR-558 is trying to protect a captured Dominion communications array. The array could be an invaluable source of information, provided anyone can figure out how the machine works, which is why the unit has been stuck in place for months without reprieve, waiting to be rotated away from the front lines. But the value of the array is purely theoretical. It’s possible no one will ever determine how to hack into it. Our heroes win the fight, but it could all be for nothing; and when Worf tries to reassure Sisko, “This was a great victory. One worthy of story and song,” Sisko can only reply, “It cost enough.” There’s not anything else to say.

Stray observations:

- What I love about the exchange between Worf and Sisko is that Worf’s comment doesn’t come across as facile or shallow; the Klingon has seen his share of battle and loss, and he justifies those experiences with a faith in the value of a “great victory.” It’s just not a faith Sisko shares.
- Every time the casualty reports come up, I remember [“In The Pale Moonlight.”](#) Still impressed how the show has never mentioned that again.
- Sisko and Quark spar a lot, but while in another other situation, Sisko would have the clear moral authority, here, things are murkier. “I bet you wouldn’t send Jake out there,” Quark tells him. “Jake isn’t a Starfleet officer,” Sisko tells him, which is, and isn’t, an answer.
- “Captain. The kid did all right,” Reese tells Sisko. It’s about Nog, and it’s a little troubling how good that kind of praise feels.
- Oh, and Ezri once again talks about her multiple past lives. I realize she’s a Trill, and that Dax has been through a lot, but I’m not sure this is the best way to build a character.

“Covenant” (season 7, episode 9; originally 11/25/1998)

In which Dukat is in the corner, in the spotlight, building his religion...

Ah, so this is why everyone was complaining about where Dukat ended up.

Some failed stories are so shoddy, so sloppily constructed, so fundamentally misguided and inept that they’re easy to dismiss; you watch, say, a given chunk of the second season of *The Walking Dead* (which had a few strong episodes but was largely one hell of a slog), and you can see writers struggling to fill time without any good idea of how to do it. But some stories have a strong enough idea at their

core that it's possible to understand how a creative team could've fallen in love with them, to their (and our) misfortune.

The last we saw Dukat, he'd communed with a Pah-Wraith, killed Jadzia, and temporarily saved the day for the Dominion. But that wasn't an end-point for the character, and given how important Dukat has been to the series on the whole, it would've been weird for him to disappear without at least one more guest appearance.

What do you do with Dukat, though? He's been a bureaucrat, a military leader, a rebel; he's been victorious, and he's lost, and he's sworn vengeance numerous times. The Dominion no longer trusts him, and Damar has taken his place as the ruler of Cardassia (a role Damar doesn't appear to get much pleasure out of these days). Dukat's arrogance and drive wouldn't let him turn himself over to the Federation, nor is it possible to see him serving obediently as a minor cog in the empire he once ruled. So he's gone freelance with the villainy, but that still isn't quite enough. Dukat has an ego, and an ego requires an audience; he needs a place, a context to establish himself at the center of. Which creates a problem for the writers, because what new context can they introduce which hasn't been done before? Make Dukat the head of a duplicitous theater troupe? Make him a pirate? (Weird how I went to "theater troupe" before "pirate.") "Actor" or "common criminal" doesn't have the right ring to it. Dukat would demand something with bombast, something that would help him maintain his conviction that he is right in all things, and the sooner the universe comes around to accepting that, the happier everyone will be.

Making Dukat the leader of a cult devoted to worshipping the Pah-Wraiths makes sense, then. His constant belief in himself, and his way of shifting the past until he comes out looking like a hero means he's a man who's more than capable of the sort of self-mythologizing necessary to bring in the suckers; and his encounter with the Pah-Wraith, and the massive (if temporary) effect that encounter had on Bajoran faith, gives him enough mystique to draw in the vulnerable and the soul-weary. It's a development that can be justified in terms of logic, and that's always a deadly spot for writers because once you back yourself into it—and especially once you think you can get a whole good episode out of the idea—it must be nearly impossible to back out. Maybe no one involved even realized it wasn't going to work. Maybe all the rational reasons for why all of this makes sense made it possible to ignore the rotting, unpleasant truth.

Because "Covenant" doesn't work, despite being well-acted, fitfully entertaining, and character-consistent. And it's frustrating to watch because it's hard to pinpoint exactly why this fails. Kira squaring off against Dukat is always good for some laughs (and by "laughs" I mean "tense, occasionally skin-crawl-inducing drama"), and it's not as though Dukat is playing against character here. In a way, it's fascinating; there's a line between "religious Dukat" and "conniving bastard Dukat," but while the latter ultimately takes precedence, it's entirely possible that the former still exists. For much of the episode, Dukat appears to be at peace with his new place in life, and the Bajorans he's pulled in to follow his path (the cult believes that the Pah-Wraiths, not the wormhole aliens, are the true Prophets, and all the horrible things which have happened to Bajor happened because everyone was following the wrong gods) are all deeply committed to his cause. That's not to say the cultists can't have been fooled—they have been, which becomes imminently clear when the one of them gives birth to Dukat's baby, and he pretends it's a sign from the Pah-Wraiths. But there's a weird sort of sincerity to his selfishness. As ever, he makes monstrous decisions (the climax of the episode has him

attempting to convince the entire cult to commit suicide on religious grounds, and using a fake poison to save himself), but those decisions are filtered through a new set of justifications. He's not just a lusty, vengeful psychotic. He has a mission from the gods—and he, like Sisko, is their Emissary. In one of the episode's more gratifyingly subtle moments, Dukat uses the e-word only once, but it echoes through the rest of the story. Over and over, Dukat tries to prove himself to be more than he is, and over and over he's brought down by his worst impulses.

Maybe that's the problem, then. I have no desire to see Dukat "redeemed;" I don't think such a thing is possible in light of his crimes, and an arc that has him locked away in a prison somewhere (or executed, although I'm not sure if the Federation even does that) doesn't appeal much either. He gives good villain, and he was arguably the most interesting when our heroes were forced to deal with him even as they despised him. But this shtick gets old after a while, and this episode, which purports to deal in questions of faith and meaning, doesn't have much depth. Dukat, for all his changes, is a static figure at his core: to admit just how monstrous he was during the Occupation would mean destroying his entire sense of self, and as much as he's earned such a painful reckoning, it's never going to happen. If we've learned nothing else about the character, we know that Dukat is a master at self-justification. Seeing him all benevolent and supposedly wise doesn't change this, and while the discovery that he's been sleeping around a bit makes for a good joke (that Cardassian baby made me laugh), it's not dramatically engaging anymore. This is just a new set of clothes on the same old plotline; Dukat acts like he's not a dick, but he's still a dick, rinse, repeat.

Still, that could've been effective if the Bajorans Kira meets after being beamed away to Empok Nor were compelling in their own right. The main suspense of the story should come not from the chance that Dukat might have changed, or the possibility that Kira might turn her back on her faith (which, c'mon), but from the hope that the cultists will realize the truth before it's too late. And they do, although it's a very close call, and not all of them can handle the realization. Vedek Fala (Norman Parker) helps Dukat kidnap Kira off the station, and out of everyone we meet, he's the most convinced of the righteousness of their cause; so when Dukat turns out to be a sham, and Fala poisons himself anyway, there's a tragedy to that, especially in light of the fact that, as Kira explains, we don't know for sure why Fala did what he did—was it grief, or a conviction that his faith mattered more than logic? Ambiguity is good, tragedy is good, but the conflict never gets beyond the shouting stage. Not that Fala shouts, exactly, but his adamant convictions, set against Kira's own rock-solid belief, making for tedious, pointless arguments.

The only other characters to get much screentime are the victims of Dukat's unfortunately nocturnal predilections. Married couple Mika (Maureen Flannigan) and Benyan (Jason Leland Adams) are irritatingly devout (at least Benyan is), but then Mika gives birth to a Cardassian, and all bets are off. Again: it's kind of funny, in a mean sort of way, after everyone is so excited about the birth to see Benyan's face fall when he realizes what probably happened, but it's not enough. Neither character gets more than a cursory development, which is especially unsettling in Mika's case; she has a private scene with Dukat, and he apologizes for his "transgressions" (before trying to smother her in an airlock, such a charmer), but it's impossible to tell if she willingly cheated on her husband with the "charismatic" leader, or if this was a rape, or somewhere in between. She has no agency at all.

Really, apart from Fala, none of the cultists do, which means the episode quickly turns into waiting game for Dukat to finally betray himself enough for Kira to get the upper hand. There are too many

scenes of Kira trying hopeless to talk some sense into the cultists, scenes which nominally attempt to create ambiguity by suggesting that the cultists are, in fact, happy with what they have and with their faith. But since we know from the start they're wrong, the ambiguity doesn't have any traction at all. "Covenant" isn't a complete waste. Nana Visitor is great even in a story that limits her reactions, and Marc Alaimo is so excellent as Dukat that it's almost worth getting a dud plotline like this just to see how he'll handle it. But as far as character directions go, there's little of value to be found here. It's a bad choice just smart enough to look like a good one.

Stray observations:

- Not sure what to make of the scene of Odo saying he wished he had faith in the Prophets, so he could attend services with Kira. It's sweet of him, but dude, it's okay if you don't spend every waking minute together, y'know?

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "It's Only A Paper Moon"/"Prodigal Daughter"[Zack Handlen](#)[3/06/14 10:00AM](#)**"It's Only A Paper Moon" (season 7, episode 10; originally aired 12/30/1998)***In which in general, we prefer the lie...*

I love big novels. Thousand-page plus ones, the sort that give you back problems from lugging them around all day; the ones you have to figure out how to read in bed, because they're so big you can't just lay back and prop them up, and it turns into this negotiation with your arms and physics that means you're always just a little uncomfortable. I love it when I read a review of a video game and find out it'll take over 40 hours to play through. I love buying full seasons of a TV show, and knowing I have it there for me, waiting, even though I also know I'll probably never get around to watching the whole thing. I love getting lost in safe places. And while I've made fun of the concept before, and criticized the writers for all the soft science behind it, I would dearly love a holosuite of my own. I'm sure most of us would. Putting aside the troubling psychological implications and the near impossibility of the technology, who wouldn't want a machine that can take you anywhere, let you do anything, and keep you absolutely safe at the same time? (Forget, for a moment, the fact that so many holo-stories hinge on safety protocols collapsing.) It's pure fantasy. And pure fantasy is hard to walk away from.

"It's Only A Paper Moon" has some problems. Once again, we have a holo-program whose parameters and flexibility are mind-boggling, a fact that no one in the episode seems to regard with much more than passing curiosity. Nog spends days—weeks, maybe—living inside a program that, as Vic tells it, was never supposed to be running for more than six or seven hours at a time; and while it's plausible that the programmers designed the system so that it would be capable of self-sustaining, it's hard to imagine the resources and foresight that would be required to make something like that work. But

really, that's more a "just go with it" kind of problem. Either you accept that a holosuite program can pretty much simulate a world (at one point, Vic mentions his and Nog's plans to go to Tahoe, because I guess they can do that?), or you don't. It's the future, so I'll roll with it.

That's harder to do when it comes to Vic Fontaine, a character who I like (he's pleasant and no fuss, which is cool) but am still suspicious of. His supposed self-awareness raises any number of complex issues, but the show hasn't been interested in addressing any of them. His consciousness was accepted as a simple fact, and while that's easy to overlook when he's doing occasional cameo appearances, the more a storyline focuses on him, the weirder it gets. One of the subtler arcs of "It's Only A Paper Moon" deals with how Vic reacts to being "on" more than he's used to; the longer the program runs, the more of a life Vic gets to lead apart from his duties as a performer, and the more he gets a taste for existence. Which doesn't really make a whole lot of sense if you think about it. I mean, you could hand wave the whole thing as the program adjusting to Nog's demands, and providing him with the escape hatch he so desperately needs by simulating a more fully realized Vic, but the strong implication here is that Vic himself (itself?) is experiencing an expanded consciousness. It's why he goes along with Nog's need to hide for so long—partly because he's built to please, and partly because he's getting into Nog's plans for a new casino, and enjoying having a life. Everyone on the station who talks to him is fixated on Nog's well-being, and while that's understandable, Ezri treats the program (who actually contradicts her advice) as a kind of vaguely benevolent deity; not something she worships, but also not a piece of tech to be ordered around and ignored. (Though she does attempt to force the issue, and it's Nog who insists on staying.) To really enjoy this, you need to turn your brain off, or at least the parts of it that get caught up on story logic and philosophical implications and whatnot, and that's not something I'm a fan of. Hell, I don't even think it's possible.

Putting that can of worms aside, there's also the frustrating fact that Vic is the one who finally forces Nog back out into the real world. This is a mixed blessing. If you can overlook the terrifying possibilities of Vic's existence (he's a program who can turn himself off and turn himself on! Here's hoping he doesn't ever decide to start messing with life support), it's nice to have the seductive nature of the holosuite fully realized. Of course Nog wouldn't want to leave such a comfortable, insulating world. Who would? But turning Vic into the world's most unflappable life coach makes Nog almost a passive figure, someone whose grief and terror are so overwhelming that he becomes incapable of making the best decisions for his own well-being. If he's refuses to leave the holo-world of his own free will, what's to say he'll be able to function back in reality when he's forced to do so? The episode takes the shortcut approach to psychological discovery, spending so much time building up Nog's problems while keeping their underlying causes secret, that when the reveal finally comes, the act of confession is intended to function as a kind of cure-all. Nog is troubled; Nog hides for a while; Vic forces him out; Nog breaks down and monologues about how scared he is; everything's fine. I realize the limitations of television, even the serialized kind, and that this sort of approach is typically meant as shorthand for a longer therapeutic process. And hey, I'm just grateful and impressed that the writers were willing to spend as much time as they did on something which could just as easily have been shrugged off entirely. But trying to combine Nog's story with Vic's awakening shortchanges both stories.

Yet I wouldn't say this is a terrible hour of television, or even a mediocre one. More than any other holosuite/holodeck episode I've seen this captures the pure pleasure of hiding in fiction, of detaching yourself from the concerns of the real world and embracing the lie for as long as possible. Nog's post-

traumatic stress has some real edges to it, and some aspects of it should be familiar to anyone who's suffered a period of severe depression; the uncomfortableness around others, the sleeping, the fixation on a certain song or film (or book; I tend to reread stuff, usually by Stephen King, when I'm feeling awful). That familiarity gives Nog's eventual decision to move into Vic's program extra resonance. Fiction serves any number of purposes—enlightenment, increased empathy, helping you out with the ole vocabulary—but one of its more maligned, and I think most important, functions, is as a way to disrupt the frequency of real life, an opportunity to disengage and be alone with the dreams of our innermost selves.

In a way, the fictional world Nog inhabits for a brief time is too well-realized; not because it's unbelievable, but because the distinction between “real” and “fake” is so thin that it threatens to take the episode in directions it has no interest in going. One of the creepier aspects of holosuite tech is trying to figure out just what would happen if it became available in the real world, and how quickly people would just disappear into the machine, growing more and more fixated on an existence where there were no coincidences, no failures which didn't just lead to greater successes, and no heartbreak. This is troubling stuff with no easy answers, and Trek has always shrugged it off in the past. Here, the question comes to the forefront, and the answer is merely, “You're better off living in the real world because it's real,” with no other justification. Sure, Rom and Leeta miss Nog, but it's not like he isn't easy to visit; the most explanation we get is Vic saying, “You should live your life because I really wish I had one.” It would've been nice to see some sort of limitation inherent in the simulation, to show Nog missing the reality he temporarily abandoned, and watch as his homesickness fought against his fear until he was finally motivated to face his problems on his own terms. Instead, he hangs out in the Garden of Eden until God pulls the plug. Or the snake does. Or maybe it's an angel. Anyway, this episode is decent, and the central idea is actually quite cool—I just wish the writers hadn't taken the easy way out in the end with the magical all-knowing computer program.

Stray observations:

- We're not supposed to try and “fix” the episodes we review, for understandable reasons, but now I'm imagining a scenario in which Nog comes to his senses when he realizes that Vic, for all his coolness, is just a simulation of a person, and not the real thing. But then that would mean undercutting the show's apparent infatuation with the character, so we get this instead.
- Aron Eisenberg is excellent; he's really come a long way.
- I believe there's a mention of Bashir and O'Brien's Alamo program at one point. I'm trying to keep up on these.
- Jake has a date! And Nog picks a fight with that date, and then with Jake. At times, Nog's anger threatens to turn into something darker than even this show would've been willing to handle.
- Ezri does some counseling, and she's not terrible? It's weird how nobody brings up medication, though it's not a huge surprise.
- I love how Nog goes back to his roots in times of stress, working through Vic's books and coming up with a crazy plan about building a new casino.
- To thank Vic for helping him, Nog arranges to keep Vic's program running “26 hours a day,” so he can experience the joys of life for himself. This is sweet. I'm not going to think about it any more than that. It's just sweet.

“Prodigal Daughter” (season 7, episode 11; 1/6/1999)*In which we learn more than we need to know about Ezri...*

To sum up: Ezri’s mother is a controlling, judgemental twit, one of her brothers is kind of a doofus, and the other one is a sensitive soul driven to commit murder by his mother’s never-ending judgements and expectations. Ezri has been avoiding going home for a long time, but when Chief O’Brien goes missing while on the hunt for Bilby’s missing wife (remember [Bilby?](#)), and Ezri’s family has connections in the area where O’Brien disappeared, well, you do the math. It all ends sadly, and Ezri is back on the station with a few more pounds of guilt on her back, and not much else.

That’s it, basically. Strip away the plot complications and a Sisko rant (he’s not happy when O’Brien disappears), and that’s your episode: a so-so family drama about people we will almost certainly never see again. It’s bitter and loaded with subtext, and the actors are fine (Kevin Rahm, best known ‘round these parts as Ted from [Mad Men](#), is great as the wounded, vulnerable, and murderous Norvo), but it’s hard to get much worked up about any of it. This is slow motion tragedy, but it’s a tragedy that’s largely designed to paint Ezri’s mother (Leigh Taylor-Young) as domineering and destructive without ever bothering to give her a character beyond those terms. I’ll give them credit: Yanas’s cruelty is psychologically convincing, and it’s believable that, intentionally or not, she’s mentally beaten two of her children into the shapes she wanted for them. But the coldness the episode shows to her, the complete indifference towards giving her even the slightest justification for acting the way she does, makes her into a caricature of an abusive parent. She’s not a human being, she’s a monster, and that makes her family’s story significantly less interesting.

And really, it needs all the “interesting” it can get. Pull away the sci-fi elements (of which there are hardly any to speak of), and this is an old, old plotline, something that could’ve easily showed up on an episode of *The Incredible Hulk* back in the day. The family owns a once powerful mining company, and the Orion Syndicate has been trying to muscle in on their profits; without anyone else in the family realizing it, Janel (Mikael Salazar), the eldest son, borrowed money from the Syndicate when the company fell on hard times, and is now struggling to maintain autonomy in the face of increased pressure and sabotage. As part of the payback deal, Janel hired a woman named Morica for the Syndicate—she didn’t do a job, exactly, but she did get paid. But then she started asking for more money, and wouldn’t you know it, she ends up dead, murdered by Norvo in an attempt to make us overlook his goofy name and see him as more than just a drunken failed painter.

There’s nothing compelling about any of this. The best bits are Ezri’s conversations with Norvo before the truth comes out; the two actors have decent sibling chemistry, and there’s a growing sadness to their scenes together as it becomes increasingly obvious that despite Ezri’s wishes, her brother is just not going to be able to save himself from whatever trap he’s fallen into. But otherwise, the relationships and conflicts are so obvious and shallowly rendered that they never get beyond the perfunctory. Norvo’s confession is sad, but it’s not so sad that it justifies the time it took to get there. These people and their problems are not enough to warrant the investment of an entire episode. And without any cool hook or twisty premise, it’s mostly just a slow slog to a painful conclusion.

O’Brien’s involvement certainly doesn’t help. He’s as reliable as ever, but by using his efforts to rescue the wife of an old friend as an excuse to force Ezri back into orbit with her upsetting family, the episode leans heavily on coincidence (the dead woman, Morica, is Bilby’s ex; small universe, huh?),

and reduces an unseen corpse to a plot point. That isn't offensive or anything—Morica is barely even a name—but it does make the investigation of her murder a lot harder to give a damn about. O'Brien, the only person with any emotional investment in her death at all, spends most of the hour on the sidelines, demanding answers as Ezri tries to fix people who were broken years ago. The only urgency to the case is in finding out how far the damage goes, and even the final reveal plays more like an afterthought than a devastating discovery of rotten lives.

Which means the only possible point of any of this is to tell us more about Ezri. This is probably the most successful aspect of the episode, although that isn't saying much. We know by now that she's a bit nervous and over-compensating and eager to please, but much of that could've come from the mental disruption and anxiety brought on by the Dax symbiont. After meeting her family, though, it's clear that Ezri's insecurities come from years of criticism and emotional abuse from dear old Mom. These patterns start to cycle up again as soon as she returns home, but Ezri has more backbone and experience now (at least in part thanks to Dax), and she's better able to stand up for herself. She tries to get Norvo to do the same, but it's too late for him.

That, then, is the sum total of our gain from "Prodigal Daughter": we know Ezri is the way she is because she had a difficult childhood. Which sucks for her, but sucks more for us, because we had to waste time when there's a war going on, and genetically engineered super soldiers, and shape-changing aliens, and Jeffrey Combs, and time-warping wormhole pseudo-gods, and, ugh, literally just about anything would've been better than this..

Stray observations:

- At the start of the episode, Bashir is worried about O'Brien (another mention of the Alamo program), and there's a brief, fleeting hope that the story might be about them. But alas.
- "Hello, Mother." "I hate your hair." Says it all, really.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "The Emperor's New Cloak"/"Field Of Fire"[Zack Handlen](#)[3/13/14 10:00AM](#)**"The Emperor's New Cloak" (season 7, episode 12; originally aired 2/3/1999)***In which Quark and Rom break on through to the other side...*

God, even the title is stupid. It's a pun on the fairy tale and the fact that Grand Nagus Zek begs Quark and Rom to seal a cloaking device to save him from the mirror universe, but the actual plot has no parallels with the original story, and, oh who gives a damn. Clearly the writers did not. "The Emperor's New Cloak" isn't as awful as ["Profit And Lace,"](#) and it has a few funny bits scattered through its running time, but there's no reason for it to exist. Now, to be fair, there are 25 episodes in Deep Space Nine's final season, and the episode order existed before the writers sat down to come up with storylines; they're filling a space, not creating the space as they fill it, and that inevitably means some episodes are going to be more obligation than inspiration. But the trick is to hide that lack of vitality as well as possible. Mashing together a Ferengi-centric episode with a Mirror Universe episode has a certain economy to it, no question, and it's true that the Mirror Universe has become tired enough that about the only approach left is the sort of broad, slightly dark comedy Ferengi storylines usually deal in, but, well...

If I could leave a review as an ellipsis, it would be this one, but I doubt that would go over well with my editors. I think I've harangued about the problems with repeat visits to the Mirror Universe so many times by now that my complaints are almost as tiresome as the dimension itself. It's just hard to care about the long-term problems of a setting that was initially created solely to offer a startling contrast to the "normal" reality of the show. The more the Alliance and the Rebellion take on shape, the more the shock wears off and the thinner the characters become; and the refusal of the writers to decide on

a consistent philosophy for the setting (as Rom keeps pointing out, in one of the episode's best, most telling, jokes) means that the fun of spotting the differences gets lost in a lot of metaphysical confusion.

For example: Other Bashir isn't well-developed enough in his own right for me to care about him. He's interesting only in the way he reflects back on the regular Bashir. But since that reflection has been established numerous times, and since this Bashir is, while aggressive and violent, still basically working for the "good" guys, the comparison has lost any real value. It's neat that the other O'Brien and the other Bashir seem to be chums, but that's as far as it goes. (I do still think O'Brien's fundamental consistency over all universes is a nice character beat.) By trying to turn what is essentially a one-note conceptual punchline into a sustainable reality with a consistent mythology, the writers robbed the Mirror Universe of its vitality and danger. It's just a place people sometimes go now, with no cost to the transit, and no real spark.

Sure, "The Emperor's New Cloak" tries to create a sense of danger: Zek is being held by the Intendant (a character whose shtick has grown so old her lines must be read off bumper stickers), and needs Quark and Rom to bring him a cloaking device to rescue him, but it's all a trap planned by the Intendant and other Ezri, and so on and whatever. There are just enough threats and violence to keep characters from floating off into the space, but the urgency is lacking throughout. The closest we get to a surprise is other Brunt's sad death, and while it's amusing to see the Mirror Universe episode continue its tradition of murdering Ferengis, other Brunt's doomed friendship with other Ezri just isn't enough to hang all of this on.

Maybe that's the real reason we get one last Mirror Universe story before the end (I've been informed that this is the last one; if this person was lying to me, I will hunt them down and not leave until they apologize). Not the death of other Brunt, who is friendly and loyal to a fault, but to give Ezri a chance to show off her dark side. Which is fine, I guess? Nicole de Boer isn't exactly threatening, although she does all right. There's an intimate moment between other Ezri and the Intendant about half-way through the episode, a twist to show that Quark and Rom are even more screwed than they'd initially realized, and it's pretty cheesy exploitation-wise, although it makes sense that the Intendant would be willing to use sex to get what she wants from anyone. I mean, that is literally her entire character. Ostensibly, there's a throughline about Quark having "feelings" for the regular Ezri (who is currently getting closer to Bashir, a potential relationship I know I should have feelings about one way or the other, but mostly just seems fine to me), and how he bonds a bit with other Ezri, although thank god that doesn't go anywhere.

What struck me the most this time through the MU was how much the place had taken on the tone of some cheesy '80s action cartoon, full of shouting, ineffectual villains, goofy twists, and no real consequences whatsoever. Take away the sex stuff (which becomes less and less present with each iteration) and the body count (other Brunt does die), and you could put this between the original *Transformers* and *G.I. Joe* and nobody would bat an eye. It's amusing enough to see Worf rant and complain like some second rate Megatron, but Garak's one note Starscream routine gets old fast, which is not something I thought I'd ever say about an Andrew Robinson performance. The actor tries, but there's just not a whole lot to do.

The only time any of this works are the few moments when the MU actually serves its original function: as a way to contextualize the characters we actually give a damn about. Rom's endless nitpicking is both a funny way to hang a lampshade on some half-assed writing, and a character bit perfectly in keeping with his regular level-headed approach to life. Where everyone else just rolls with what's happening, Rom is convinced he's stupid, and so he actually puts the time in to try and understand the contradictions, even though you really can't. And as unappealing as other Garak has become, the scene of Quark, Rom, and Zek getting the better of him by rubbing in just how much craftier and smarter non-MU Garak is is enjoyable enough, if only because it's fun to hear anyone try and describe the greatness of our Garak. Also, other Garak dies horribly at the end, so I suppose that's something.

On the whole, this was too jokey and disengaged to be anything but a chore. Zek's decision to try and branch out into the Mirror Universe sort of makes sense, in that the Nagus is always looking for the next untapped market, but "sort of making sense" doesn't mean that anyone desperately needed to see what would happen if he did. Besides, that's just an excuse to get Zek into the MU where he can get captured and held for ransom, which in itself is really just an excuse to get Quark and Rom involved, which in itself is really just an excuse to fill an episode slot, which is really just an excuse to get us that much closer to the series finale. And now I'm sad. Thanks a lot, stupid television show.

Stray observations:

- **Straight dudes, talkin' 'bout DS9:** Mirror Universe Ezri is very attractive. The Joan Jett look is a good fit for her.
- So Vic Fontaine is real in the Mirror Universe? The writers are trolling us now.
- I don't need to hear Quark praying to his god about "sealing the deal" with Ezri. Just, no.
- Ha ha, other Leeta wants nothing to do with Rom! That's so weird.
- Thank god we won't have to deal with the Intendant again. What started as a striking, enjoyably campy turn by one of the series' best actors has turned into a trap, forcing Nana Visitor to reduce herself to the same tired "Oh wow, I am very sensual and want to fuck everything and use sex as a weapon, that's so hot!" shtick every time the character appears. It's embarrassing, and her final (please god) appearance barely registers.

"Field Of Fire" (season 7, episode 13; originally aired 2/10/1999)

In which Ezri needs to make the lambs stop screaming...

Do you watch [Hannibal](#)? You should. Or, at the very least, you should give it a try. The show is definitely not for everyone—it has distinct, odd rhythms, and the violence, while beautiful, is intense and often shockingly graphic. But it's one of the best shows on the air right now, and its nightmarish visions and sharp, complex character work more than justify the occasional pained shudder. (If you're like me, the shudders are actually part of the appeal.) The serial killer genre has gotten so old it regularly forgets where it left the keys to the stabbing room, but Hannibal takes a whole host of stale ideas and imbues them with fresh, monstrous life. Using mythology from a handful of Thomas Harris novels, the show follows Will Graham (Hugh Dancy), a profiler with the gift/curse of "total empathy," in his work tracking killers for the FBI. Along the way, he meets a psychiatrist named Hannibal Lecter (Mads Mikkelsen). Hannibal has secrets. Things progress from there.

It's an exceptional work, and one that deserves more viewers than it has. I mention it here because I like talking about it, but also because "Field Of Fire" has, if not exactly the same premise, than at least a few shared ideas. A nice young man is murdered on the station, and everyone's at a loss. Ezri, who was the last person to see him alive, is despondent, and decides it's her job to find his killer. I'm not sure why; you'd think Odo would be the one on the case, as Ezri doesn't have a lot of legal experience. She does have a counseling degree (or whatever the future equivalent of such a degree would be) as a therapist, so I supposed she'd have some insight into disturbed psyches. More importantly, one of Dax's past hosts was a killer himself, and if she allows him out of the memory hole, he might be able to provide the crucial insight that leads Ezri to the murderer. Just like, say, a profile is able to imagine themselves in someone else's (bloody) shoes.

Look, let's be honest: I wasted a paragraph talking about Hannibal because there really isn't a whole lot to talk about in "Field Of Fire." Chalk it up to my fundamental immaturity as a reviewer, but like "The Emperor's New Cloak," this is a slog; and unlike "Cloak," this episode has precious little humor to recommend it. The mystery that gets Ezri to awaken Joran (Leigh McCloskey) is almost an after-thought, even though the killer murders three people, which seems like a lot for a non-battle situation. Sure, there are occupations and Pah-Wraiths and system failures and all sorts of craziness, but multiple murders with no overt connection, apart from a very specific sort of gun—that's something new. You'd think people on the station would be freaking out, especially once O'Brien realizes (in probably the coolest part of the story) that the killer is using a weapon with a small teleportation device attached, allowing him or her (SPOILER: it's a him) to shoot anyone from long range. The killer literally kills people alone in their rooms behind closed doors. That's terrifying, and yet we get no sense whatsoever that anyone on DS9 apart from the main ensemble knows or cares.

Instead, we follow Ezri around as she worries about what's happening, grows increasingly determined to solve the case, and then, after an inadvertent pep talk from Worf of all people ("You are Dax. It is your way."), decides to get in touch with Joran. For the rest of the episode, the two form a deadly serious buddy-cop duo, as Joran urges Ezri to savor the evil, and Ezri argues with him in public places because she's an idiot. It's terribly silly, and not particularly convincing; regardless of whomever has held the symbiont in the past, Ezri is about as threatening as a sprinkle-free cupcake, and the possibility of her being seduced by the darkside is as likely as Quark becoming a Marxist. As Ezri and her phantasmal partner come closer to the killer, will Joran's more violent impulses take control? No, they won't, although Ezri does briefly hold a knife at some guy, and Sisko is really upset about it.

Actually, that's such a dumb exchange it's worth focusing on for a second. Ezri and Joran are sitting in Quark's when an ensign tries to run out of the bar. Thinking that Odo's men have finally tracked down the killer, Ezri uses a chair to trip the fugitive, then tackles him; when he throws her, she grabs a knife and threatens him with it. This is apparently some monstrous breach in protocol, although a.) the guy was bigger than she was and b.) he'd just hit her. Sisko's lecture is supposed to be a sign that Ezri is getting in too deep with Joran, that she's losing her objectivity and her grip, but given the context, it plays like a ludicrous overreaction to what was actually a sensible, if somewhat overheated, tactical move. Pretty much all of Ezri's "struggles" with Joran play like this; we're supposed to be disturbed at the moral and psychological risk she's taking, but the seductions are trite, and the moral complexity of the situation never requires her to make any difficult choices.

It doesn't help that the resolution of the mystery is painfully trite. Ezri realizes that the one element connecting all three victims is that each has a framed photograph in their room of themselves smiling with their loved ones. She then makes the leap that this must mean the killer hates emotion, which leads her to the assumption that a Vulcan might be involved—not a normal Vulcan, but someone who has cause to be violently angry at anyone who expresses happiness. This is a large deductive jump with very little to back it up, and it gets worse when Ezri and Joran board a turbolift and a Vulcan boards as well; Joran immediately decides that this Vulcan is the killer, and he's right. Seriously: Ezri comes up with a theory, and minutes later she runs into the killer, entirely by coincidence.

This is lousy plotting, and the fact that there's ultimately no twist to the story—the Vulcan is murdering people because he lost most of his crew when his ship was destroyed, so now he's crazy and whatever—makes it worse. The final confrontation has Ezri and the killer staring each other down over their magic teleportation weapons, Joran urging her to pull the trigger, but when she does, she shoots the Vulcan in the shoulder, and he helpfully shoots back too late to actually do any damage. Ezri then resists any urge to kill the Vulcan in cold blood. There's no ambiguity about any of it, and no indication that any of this will leave scars on Ezri's tender psyche. The mystery is uninteresting, the killer is ineptly characterized, and the only positive in the resolution is that we probably won't have to go through this again.

But hey, I found bright spots in “The Emperor's New Cloak,” I might as well try and find some here. The cold open, which introduces the Vulcan's first victim, is fun in a this is what *Star Trek* would look like if it was *Law & Order* kind of way. And while Joran wasn't a richly defined figure, I enjoyed McCloskey's performance. He wasn't scary or even remotely threatening, but I liked his voice for some reason. Look, at this point, I'll take what I can get. This is a not very good episode that wasn't a complete catastrophe, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed that things get better soon.

Stray observations:

- More references to the Alamo program; it's even a minor plot point, as Bashir and O'Brien first refuse to allow Ilario to join them in the holosuite (their immediate refusal is hilariously dickish; they don't even seem to consider his request at all), and then the two of them chat about feeling guilty over the whole thing. The chat gives Bashir a chance to talk about how settlers used to get very attached to their firearms, which in turn provides O'Brien with a crucial piece in solving the murder.
- Worf is apparently the only person on the station to be concerned that there's a murderer on the loose. Which is good of him, although his “concern” leads him to follow Ezri around without her knowledge, and then, when she catches him at it, lecture her on how she needs to stay in her quarters at night. You have issues, Worf.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: "Chimera"/"Badda-Bing, Badda-Bang"Zack Handlen3/20/14 10:00AM**"Chimera" (season 7, episode 14; originally aired 2/17/1999)***In which Odo doesn't want to change...*

One of the things you realize as you get older is that you aren't just one person. Personality is, in a sense, a series of outfits you wear depending on context. So you have the at-work suit you wear on the job, which means you're friendly and helpful and don't swear as much. You have the at-home suit, and your with-friends suit, and your with-parents suit, and your trying-to-hit-on-a-stranger suit, and so on. Sentient beings are complex machines which have any number of programs running at any given time, and sometimes some of those programs get pushed into the background. To lead a well-balanced life, you want to know enough people and have enough opportunity to let all the strongest aspects of your personality shine.

Hardly anybody does, but I'm betting most of us are at least slightly better off than Odo, who spends all his time around others pretending to be something he's not. This pretense has become one of the defining characteristics of his life, to the point where he no longer really notices it unless someone else brings it up. One of Odo's main storylines over the course of the show has been discovering who (and what) he really is, and how those discoveries have affected his place on Deep Space Nine. Once he realized he was a Changeling, and that as a Changeling, he had a heritage and a biological identity, being the oddest creature in a station full of oddities was no longer quite so easy to accept. The tension, then, came from what he would do with this knowledge: stay the Constable, or leave and join the others like himself (at least on genetic terms) in the Great Link.

Complicating matters was Odo's love for Kira, an emotional connection which, at least in this arc, always worked better when viewed as a symbol for more complicated feelings. I have no problem with Odo being in love with Kira, but I get uncomfortable when the writers lean hard on the idea that the only thing stopping Odo from turning his back on everyone and going full Founder is his affection for one specific person. It diminishes the importance of every other friendship Odo has, and while he's never been a social butterfly, I do think that his relationships with Sisko and Quark and Garak and the rest should have some value, even if his connection to Kira comes first. A crush can influence your decisions; deep romantic yearning has driven a great number of people's to a great many things, both good and bad. But there's something simplistic and kind of sad about making it your sole motivation, in a way I'm not sure the writers realize.

"Chimera" at least makes it clear that Kira is worthy of devotion, if there was any doubt. While Odo and O'Brien are coming back to DS9 after a conference, a strange alien entity approaches and boards their ship; it's a Changeling, only this creature, who calls himself Laas (J.G. Hertzler), doesn't know he's a Changeling. Odo quickly realizes that Laas is another one of the Hundred, sent out by the Founders to study the universe and (someday) report back on what they found to the homeworld. Laas is older than Odo, and in his time traveling, he's developed some definite opinions about solids, which he calls "monoforms." He doesn't like them, and as the episode develops, the conflict becomes clear: Odo is once again being asked to question his loyalty to his friends and his place on the station against his desire to be among his own kind, and share in the link.

We've been here before, because it's not a question with an easy answer. To its credit, DS9 has never underplayed the joys of the Great Link, or Odo's deep loneliness, and it has always felt at least a little possible that he might rejoin the Founders someday. Given the almost non-existent main cast changeover during the run of the series (only one lead has left, and that was for personal, not story reasons), it's doubtful Odo was ever going to pack up and leave before the end. That's not really the kind of show this is. But at the same time, there's never been any effort to pretend that Odo isn't in a hellish spot, and the writers (and actor) have never treated the character's struggles as if it was assumed he was going to stick around.

In a way, though, that's why "Chimera" is less successful than it might have been; because this conflict has been gone over so many times before, and so thoroughly, it's hard to get invested in it again. Laas is, for entirely understandable reasons, an anti-social creature when it comes to the solids, and Odo's few attempts to integrate him into the general flow of life on the station all go as badly as you'd expect; in one particularly painful (though sort of hilarious) scene, he manages to alienate nearly all of Odo's "monoform" friends in the space of about three excruciatingly awkward minutes, and the final act of the story is precipitated when Laas kills a Klingon on the Promenade. Yet in the midsts of all of this dickishness, Laas takes an immediate shine to Odo, and begins to pepper him with questions about why he chooses to endure what, to Laas, seems like a mediocre and humiliating existence.

While Laas isn't particularly likeable (which also hurts the episode; it's fun for a bit, but his arrogance is one note), his questions aren't ones that Odo has easy answers for. So he resorts to the answer he always gives: Kira. While it's easier to justify that answer this time, given that he's in a committed relationship with Kira and not just hopelessly pining for her, there's something less than compelling about repeating this debate without (at least initially) offering any new insight. Another changeling approaches Odo, offers him a chance to be a different, potentially truer version of "himself," and this

time, that offer comes without the drawback of having to join forces with the enemy against his friends. Knowing about the disease that's running rampant through the Great Link, Laas (who also doesn't act that interested in conquest) wants to join forces with Odo, find the rest of the Hundred, and create a new link. And still, all Odo has to say for himself is "Kira."

The ending of the episode thankfully does a better job justifying this answer than previous episodes have done; when Kira learns of what's happening, she's so concerned for Odo's well-being that she helps Laas escape from jail, and sets up a rendezvous point for the two to meet later, believing that this is probably Odo's last chance for true happiness. (Laas is arrested after that whole Klingon-killing thing.) She's sacrificing her current happiness—and there's no sign whatsoever that her and Odo's relationship has been anything but blissful before now—because she wants what's best for the person she loves. Which in turn convinces Odo that he's right to stay. It's not something that Laas can understand; to him, love between a changeling and a solid (or a metamorph and a monoform) is a fleeting connection, fragile and ultimately doomed by time. To Odo, that's what makes it so precious.

That's a lovely discovery, and while the final scene of Odo turning into some kind of golden mist around Kira when she asks him to show her his true form doesn't quite work (the idea is beautiful, the execution is Nana Visitor doing her best to look rapturous in a room full of cheesy special effects), that doesn't undercut the message. What keeps all of "Chimera" from being as good as its conclusion is the fact that Odo's crises of self-identity no longer have the power they once did. It's too late in the game for him to have dramatically compelling self-doubt, especially now that the one thing he wanted more than anything has finally happened. Odo mentioning the sickness in the Great Link is necessary exposition, but it also serves the unfortunate effect of reminding us that there are much more interesting stories we could be telling than revisiting this familiar ground again. It's not that this is a bad story. I'm just not sure it told us anything we didn't already know.

Stray observations:

- O'Brien's desperate attempts to buy one of Odo's gifts for Kira is a stark reminder of the hell that is the O'Brien marriage. (Actually it's kind of sweet.)
- One of the best parts of the episode were the various forms Laas changed into that we'd never seen on the show before: there's the strange fish-like creature that catches up with the runabout, the fire in Odo's apartment, and the mist in the Promenade. Even more than Laas's arguments, these serve as pointed reminders of the potential Odo is putting aside to stay where he is.
- That said, while it makes sense that Laas would be eager to get going, I'm not sure why he's so defeatist when Odo chooses to stay. By his reckoning, Odo's relationship with Kira can't last much longer than way, forty or fifty more years? After which point, Odo will presumably be more than happy to join in the quest. Take the long view, dude.
- It's possible read Laas's fervent pro-Changeling attitude, and Odo's insistence on the importance of "passing" as a solid, as metaphor for the ways repressed races and cultures handle their oppression. At times, the episode itself seems to demand such a reading. I'm just not sure it's necessary, especially in this context.
- "You've seen through our evil plan." Ezri gets off a good one! (Seriously, I laughed.)

“Badda-Bing, Badda-Bang” (season 7, episode 15; originally aired 2/24/1999)*In which the crew does a job for a pally...*

First, a promise: I’m not going to complain about holosuite technology, partly because we’ve been down that road enough, and partly because “Badda-Bing, Badda-Bang” doesn’t offer me much to complain about. Sure, Vic is as magically conscious as ever, but the episode explains just as much as it has to, and no more. Frankie Eyes (Robert Miano) and his thug Cicci (good old Mike Starr, who I’ll always think of as the guy Gabriel Byrne punches in *Miller’s Crossing*) are a “jack-in-the-box” program hidden inside the simulation, designed by Felix, the programmer, to make sure things stay lively. O’Brien can’t just delete them or reboot the system, because that would mean Vic losing all the memories he’s established in his time on the station. And since no non-holographic person’s life is actually in danger, it makes perfect sense that our heroes would go to extreme lengths to save their friend.

This is an ideal set-up for a holosuite story: the stakes exist (if they lose, Vic gets “buried in the desert”), which means there’s legitimate tension, but the situation isn’t so dire that it has you questioning why anyone would allow such a machine in a place where people could use it. “Badda-Bing, Badda-Bang” isn’t a great hour of television. The main flaw is the pacing; far too much of the episode is sluggish, including a big chunk in the middle which gives us a fantasy version of how the heist is supposed to go down—a classic expository device, to be sure, but here, without any visual trickery or snappiness to it, the sequence just dies on-screen. The plan—emptying the count room long enough for Odo and Nog to clean out the safe, thus ensuring Frankie won’t have the skim money earmarked to pay his mob boss—isn’t so complicated that it desperately needs a visual aid, either. Apart from pace, the whole thing has that usual community-theater-ish feel that *Trek* so often gets when it attempts to homage genres it’s not really conversant in. There’s authenticity, and there’s the imitation of authenticity. This is more like one of the writer’s saw a caper movie one time as a kid, and then another writer watched the trailer for *The Godfather*, and viola. You need to get past a certain amount of chintziness. Although, since the whole thing is already a simulation designed to entertain people who have no idea what the actual deal would be like anyway, maybe that isn’t so bad. It’s dopey, but dopey is part of the point.

But I was trying to get all my criticisms out of the way before stunning you with the reveal that I actually enjoyed the episode (sorry, spoiler alert)... Well, I’m not quite sure what to make of Sisko’s issue over the fantasy element of Vic’s period version of Vegas. Structurally, it makes for a fun reveal when Sisko finally does join up with the gang. But it’s such an odd, discordant note to strike early on—he’s offended because in the actual history of Vic’s time, black people weren’t treated so great in Vegas (to put it mildly), but the holosuite program doesn’t have a setting for racism. Given the space of time between the Vegas of Vic’s and Sisko’s present, there’s something charmingly nerdy about the captain’s objections, like a Scotsman getting pissy over the inaccuracies in *Braveheart*. Yet the awkward intensity of his anger seems to be covering something else that we never really deal with. Kasidy talks some sense into him, he calms down, and ultimately forms an integral part in the final caper. If I had to guess, I’d say the writers just wanted something to create tension in the middle of the episode, and decided Sisko’s heretofore absence from the program (and maybe his time as Benny Russell?) would work well enough.

Okay, I think that covers all of my main objections (and that last isn't so much an objection as a curiosity); on the whole, I liked this. Didn't love it, but there's a certain inherent adorability to the whole thing that won me over by the end. I like all of these characters, and with most of them (excluding Ezri and Vic because they're such recent arrivals), I'm invested in them; I've spent a year or two watching their adventures unfold, and there's something to be said for the occasional adventure that doesn't require a lot of soul searching or terror or death. This is a playful hour, from the title on down, and there's something so charmingly guileless about that playfulness that I couldn't get annoyed with it.

I don't even mind Vic at this point. I mean, I don't think I ever really minded him, but his presence never made a lot of sense to me. And hell, to be honest, it still doesn't; he feels more like a character introduced for a potential spin-off series who got stuck on this show when his spin-off didn't pan out. But I don't shudder when he appears, and watching everybody (except Worf) band together to try and save him and his club was more sweet than annoying.

Yes, Kasidy's assertion about the importance of sticking up for a "friend" is a little forced, and it would've been nice if the episode had leaned less on sentiment, and more on the obvious fact that all of these people (with their very serious lives) were relishing a chance to go on a mission that wouldn't involve a body count. But it never got cloying, or overly sappy, y'know? Everyone got a fun bit or two (Kira seducing a hologram! Sisko as a big spender! Nog figuring out a safe!), and the heist itself, including the inevitable collapse that threatened to blow the whole thing apart, was pleasantly staged. Not, like, nail-biting or anything, but I was impressed at how long they dragged the time out. In a way, it felt like an homage to the original series, all seat-of-your-pants plotting and no one worrying much about plausibility.

Really, you can sum up the entire episode's appeal in the fact that Sisko sings "The Best Is Yet To Come" with Vic at the end. This is wildly indulgent; the only tenuous justification is Sisko's earlier reluctance to join in with the others. Now that he's come around, he's going to commit, dammit. But even that doesn't justify playing out the whole song. It's cool, though. Avery Brooks sounds fantastic, the whole cast is grinning like loons, and it has the fun feeling you get right after a production—the fine satisfaction of a job well done. This isn't the great story ever told. But it ain't a bad one.

Stray observations:

- According to the IMDB, this is the "last light hearted episode" of the series.
- Ezri uses reverse psychology on the creep in the counting room. Good work! (I guess this week is my "be nice to Ezri" week.)

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Inter Arma Enim Silent Leges”/“Penumbra”[Zack Handlen](#)[3/27/14 10:00AM](#)**“Inter Arma Enim Silent Leges” (season 7, episode 16; originally aired 3/3/1999)***In which Section 31 is calling...*

I wonder what Bashir would do if he learned the real reason why the Romulans aligned with the Federation in the Dominion War. Bastard that I am, I almost wish the truth would come out, just to see what would happen. [“In The Pale Moonlight”](#) probably works best if it’s never mentioned again; part of the episode’s power (which I fumblingly tried to explain in my review) comes from the realization that something terrible happened, and no one will ever know about it. Sisko being forced to live with that secret makes for a more distinct, unsettling conclusion. It suggests a universe in which crime and punishment are not an inevitable pairing, and that’s an unusual argument for a Trek show to make. I wouldn’t want to lose that just to kick off a lot of scenes of people yelling at each other about betrayal. Still, it would crush Bashir, and I’d be curious to see how he’d get over it. If he ever did.

“Inter Arma Enim Silent Leges” (a quote from Cicero which translates to “In time of war, the law falls silent”) features the return of Section 31, and it’s about damn time. Their introduction in last season’s [“Inquisition”](#) marked a sharp turn for the series, and suggested a level of intrigue and darkness lurking behind Federation politics that no previous Trek series had before. There had been betrayal in the past, and conspiracies, and the occasional over-zealous asshole, but nothing like this: a secret organization willing to use any means necessary to achieve its ends, without oversight or any clear adherence to the law. Sloan and the others weren’t just spies. They were enforcers, kidnappers, and torturers, and none of them showed even the slightest remorse about their behavior. Especially not

Sloan. Sadler is as good here as he was in his first appearance on the show—the actor’s innate brusque authority serves as an excellent foil to Siddig’s increasingly wounded naivete.

Maybe it’s unfair to call Bashir “naive.” After all, up until fairly recently, he lived in a universe where groups like Section 31 only happened to other races; cabals were a Romulan or Cardassian obsession, not something you’d expect from the clean-cut above board Federation of Planets. The big reveal of “Inter” is that Admiral Ross, the heretofore unimpeachable face of Starfleet’s anti-Dominion forces, is perfectly willing to work with Sloan and his methods if those methods garner the right results. Bashir only realizes this after Sloan pulls off his Romulan-frame job (faking his own death in the process), and it would have to be a painful discovery to learn that the very authority he’d counted on to help him bring Section 31 to justice is, in fact, sleeping with the enemy.

This is a necessary twist. If Section 31 was just some cultish outlier made of deluded psychopaths, the threat they represent would be limited; they’d be dangerous in their own right, but as soon as they could be contained, that would be the end of their story. The point of Section 31 isn’t just that they’re a bunch of scary dudes (and ladies) dressed in fascist black leather (trust me, the cows were all very mean). The point is that they suggest a grim expediency to the supposedly pure and incorruptible idealism of Starfleet. The fight against the Dominion is as much about ideology and it is about practical matters, or at least that’s what our heroes tell themselves. Sisko and the others want to maintain their way of life, because they believe that way of life is morally superior. So do we; while it’s possible to have some sympathy for the Founders, their controlling, dictatorial are just another iteration of the kind of enemy the Federation has always faced off against. The Dominion wants to dominate—the Federation wants to give everyone the chance to go their own way.

At least, that’s the assumption. But Section 31 implies that the “good guys” (the ones in command, anyway) aren’t as ideologically pure as we’d like. For Admiral Ross to ultimately be working with Sloan, and worse, using Bashir to make sure Sloan’s plan comes to fruition (and worst of all, damning an innocent Romulan in the process), is a continuation of the initial fall from innocence. First Bashir discovers there’s a secret sect who claim to be working in the best interests of the Federation; then, after he reports that sect to the proper authorities, those authorities betray him, thus completing the lesson that power corrupts. Actually, the true capper in all of this would be for Bashir to discover the truth about Sisko, thus forcing him to reckon with the idea that even the people he trusts the most can do horrible things for complicated reasons. But as I said, I doubt we’ll ever get that moment, and that’s probably for the best.

On those terms, the episode is a gratifying example of the writers refusing to back off from a challenging premise. As a story, it’s a little less successful, if only because it follows the structural arc of Bashir’s last encounter with Section 31. There’s no holodeck program involved, but the good doctor spends most of the hour with the wool pulled over his eyes—the main difference being that this time, he’s foolish enough to believe he’s one step ahead of Sloan’s plans. Long cons are often entertaining to watch, and there’s a grim satisfaction in Bashir discovering the truth a few hours after it’s possible for him to do anything constructive about it. At the same time, the dynamic of the bad (or gray, if you like) guys being five steps ahead of the hero the whole running time remains the same, so as necessary as certain twists are to the greater story, the overall impact of the episode is lessened compared to Sloan and Section 31’s first appearance. Ross’s betrayal is a big deal, but everything leading up to that is a bit old hat.

The value, then, comes from seeing how far the writers will go to fool the audience (and Bashir), as well as the characters Bashir meets along the way. Koval (John Fleck), the Romulan Sloan and Ross are working to put on the ruling council, is a bit of a wash; entertaining enough as a heavy, with a disdain for humans that's so obvious you can practically hear his stomach turn at the mere sight of Bashir, Koval's true identity (he's an inside man for the Federation) doesn't come out until after he's left the episode, which means the subtext of his performance only becomes relevant in retrospect. Adrienne Barbeau's Cretak is more interesting—as a supporter of the Alliance with the Federation she represents the kind of politician which you'd think Star Fleet would want on the council. And yet, with Bashir's inadvertent help, Section 31 has her stripped of her powers, and possibly even executed, all for doing what should've been the right thing.

Bashir eventually confronts Ross with what he's realized must be the truth, and it's a good scene. But it's strange how almost childlike Bashir's outrage is; while I agree with the doctor's objections and passion, his righteousness is oddly disappointing, like hearing a college freshman rant about wage slavery and the capitalist system. Bashir is a smart, smart man, but his efforts to shame Ross seem less about changing anything, and more about getting a chance to show off just how much better a human being Bashir is. Maybe years of more cynical genre television have worn me down, but after a while, I just wanted him to shut up and actually do something about all of this, as opposed to being disappointed and judgmental.

More satisfying is the episode's final scene, in which Sloan comes to thank Bashir for his help, and Bashir just looks tired. The sequence parallels Sloan's first appearance in the episode: sitting in a chair in the doctor's bedroom, watching him sleep. (He's the vampire Edward of government operatives.) Whereas Ross appeared somewhat abashed by Bashir's accusations, Sloan has no compunctions whatsoever about what he's done, and the contrast between the two characters makes Bashir's moral certainty all the more necessary. "Inquisition" offered the hope that our heroes could band together and remove this temporary anomaly of evil from the otherwise pristine Federation government. "Inter" suggests the blight goes far deeper than anyone wanted to believe. Bashir's rectitude may sometimes make him hard to take, and it may drive him to despair, but at heart, he's a good man in an impossible situation. Hopefully he'll react better than Sisko did.

Stray observations:

- Everyone can legally drink Romulan ale now. Huzzah!
- Sloan going undercover as "Wendell Greer" of the Dept. of Cartography, was a nice touch. It gets him closer to Bashir to make sure the operation is unfolding as planned, and also gives Sadler more screentime.
- I'm not sure I ever really believed that Sloan's stated plan—to assassinate Koval via a fatal disease and install Cretak in his place—was the Section 31 end goal. Maybe I've just seen too many of these kinds of stories, but I spent most of the running time waiting for the other shoe to drop. If Section 31 appears again on the show, I hope Bashir is a bit more skeptical.
- Nice to see Garak again, however briefly. Very helpful of him to state what the episode will be about, too.

Penumbra” (season 7, episode 17; originally aired 4/7/1999)*In which the beginning of the end, um, begins...*

The final third of DS9’s seventh season is, from what I can tell, entirely serialized; “Penumbra” checks in with some characters, and generates some cliffhangers, but it doesn’t operate as a standalone, and I suspect few of the individual hours leading up to the finale will either. Which puts me in an odd spot. I’ve reviewed my fair share of serialized television, but most serialized TV at least tries to run in episodic format, with a beginning, middle, and end. “Penumbra” is largely beginnings, and it’s constructed in such a way to make it clear that the payoffs will all come later. While I firmly believe any single episode can be judged on its own merits, there’s not a lot I can say about what happens here that doesn’t come with a hefty dose of “We’ll have to see where it goes.”

Sisko and Kasidy, sittin’ in a tree, g-e-t-t-i-n e-n-g-a-g-e-d: Well isn’t this nice. The episode starts with Sisko telling Kasidy about some beautiful land he just bought on Bajor, and while the actual proposal doesn’t happen until their next scene together, he’s clearly laying some groundwork. (Or building up the courage to take the plunge.) Given how long the two have been together at this point, marriage makes sense; I believe this may even count as the longest courtship in the show’s history thus far. (Odo has been pining for Kira for longer, maybe, but they aren’t engaged yet.)

The real meat here isn’t the romance, as nice as that is. What matters is the almost immediate conflict between the life Sisko wants to lead, with a simple wedding and a lovely house on Bajor, and the life fate has planned for him. When he and Kasidy discuss their plans in the Promenade, they both indicate a preference for something low key and intimate—but before those plans can be finalized, a young Bajoran girl approaches them and pleads to be allowed to be one of Kasidy’s 51 dias bearers. Then Sisko realizes he and his fiancée are being closely, reverently observed by the station’s Bajoran population. He’s still the Emissary, and the Emissary doesn’t get to have a quiet ceremony. He’s a symbol of something larger than himself, and that demands a certain degree of pomp.

Worse is to come; Sisko gets a vision from the Prophets, this time appearing solely in the guise of his birth mother, Sarah. She flat out tells him that he can’t get married, can’t share his path with Kasidy, and it’s striking how comparatively to the point her warning is. Other times, the Prophets have been mystical to the point of opacity, but here, no matter how Sisko tries to deny, the message is clear. The marriage can’t happen. Given what happened the last time Sisko disobeyed, you’d think he’d pay attention, but that’s the trouble with visions—they’re so eerie and detached from real world experience, they’re easy to ignore. It used to be, Sisko followed the Prophets because their wishes didn’t conflict with his own. But lately they’re demands have seem to stand directly in the way of what he wants, and never more so than now. Something’s being set up here; my only hope is that it isn’t entirely devastating. The last time Sisko went his own way, Jadzia died.

Weyoun and Damar, the oddest couple: In some other universe, maybe there’s a show that just focuses on Weyoun and Damar squabbling. I would watch that show. There’s little variation in their conversations; Damar drinks, complains, and accedes to Weyoun’s demands, and Weyoun sneers at him with barely restrained contempt. But it’s still delightful to watch. Sitcoms have been built on less. The big developments here are the return of Dukat, still preaching the Pah-Wraiths, and the continued ill health of the Female Changeling. We’ve seen the Female Changeling suffering from her illness once before, but the effect remains striking. Where before there was unbroken smoothness is now a mess

of pockmarks and cracks, suggesting decay and disease in a way that requires no further explanation. (Okay, I do hope there's a source for this sickness; the idea of it happening entirely by coincidence is a bit much.) When Weyoun visits her, we find out that a team of Vorta has been working round the clock to find a cure, without any success. The Changeling orders Weyoun to eliminate the Vorta team, and bring in their clones, on the possibility that a fresh perspective might jump start the process. Losing cohesion hasn't made her soft.

Less obviously unhealthy, but just as disturbing in its way, is Dukat's transformation from Cardassian to Bajoran. It's nice to see Marc Alaimo (mostly) out of makeup, but there's no immediate sense of what his plans are. Nothing good, I'm guessing. (It's fascinating how he was able to pressure Damar into helping him. Damar's become one of the show's best villains, even though he rarely gets more than few minutes of screentime each episode; he's so clearly in over his head, and going from true believer to self-loathing drunk is a fun arc.)

Ezri saves Worf, news at 11: Of everything that happens in "Penumbra," this was my least favorite development. If anything, the attempts to create chemistry between Ezri and Worf have been even more forced than whatever Jadzia and Worf had; but at least up until now, it was clear that there was no serious romantic feeling between them. That made sense. Ezri needed to be her own character, and for her to jump into bed with a former host's husband would be far too confusing, not to mention the fact it would be a violation of Trill law. Yet here we are. When Worf goes missing, Ezri decides to find him. Then they argue a lot. Then Ezri slaps Worf. Then they fuck. Then they get captured by the Breen.

That last part has promise, and I have no objections to the first part, either. It's entirely in character for Ezri to believe she has an obligation to keep Worf alive even when (nearly) all hope is lost. Sisko is maybe too cavalier about letting her steal a runabout and go off to look for him, but people are always pulling that sort of thing, and since Ezri does ultimately find Worf, all should be forgiven, provided they don't get murdered by the Breen.

But that make-out session and presumed post-make-out sex irks me. The "we're so mad at each other we just have to engage in physical intercourse" set-up isn't one of my favorites, although I don't deny there's some truth in it; there are plenty of relationships built more on passion than good sense. It just doesn't make sense with these two characters. Or, to put it more specifically, the only ways it makes sense strike me as deeply, deeply unhealthy. I'm not sure if it's the actors or the script, but the passion between Ezri and Worf is highly questionable. Most of the time the two are together in the scenes leading up to the kiss, Ezri is needling Worf because he's reluctant to discuss things, and she refuses to accept his reluctance.

Maybe that counts as foreplay for Klingons, but it makes Ezri look foolish—worse, actively unpleasant. And having them screw around suggests the return of a romance I'd be more than happy to forget. Thankfully, getting captured by the Breen means they have other things to worry about (I'm amazed, utterly amazed, that Worf didn't propose marriage immediately after coitus), and I'll just assume for now that this was a one-time, stress-induced, my-last-host-who-was-your-wife-was-abruptly-killed-so-I-really-needed-closure kind of thing. We'll find out next week.

Stray observations:

- “She’s a Dax. Sometimes they don’t think. They just do.” Is this like Tiggers and bouncing?
- Sisko asks Jake to be his best man. The father-son thing they have going on is one of the show’s best, and more reliable, relationships; I’m going to miss it a lot.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Til Death Do Us Part”/“Strange Bedfellows”[Zack Handlen](#)[4/03/14 10:00AM](#)

“Til Death Do Us Part”/“Strange Bedfellows” (season 7, episodes 18 & 19; originally aired 4/14/1999 and 4/21/1999)

In which the plot thickens...

What do we do when religions fails us? A Sisko/Winn co-production

For most of the run of *Deep Space Nine*, Sisko’s connection to the Prophets has been a gift. An often ambiguous, confusing gift, to be sure, and one which has led him down the path of obsession more than a few times, making spiritual demands on him that were rarely simple or easy to accommodate—but a gift nonetheless. Sisko has never been a stupid man, and it would’ve strained credibility to believe he’d hold onto his faith in the wormhole aliens for as long as he has if that faith wasn’t a positive force in his life. But now the Prophets—at least, one of the Prophets—is trying to warn him off of marrying Kasidy. This confuses things.

Kai Winn is a woman who has used the bedrock of her belief to justify decades of conniving, plotting ambition. It’s a self-serving, corrupt approach to spirituality (in that instead of an expansion of the soul, Winn is perpetually retracting, interpreting events and others’ wishes only through the dim, flickering light of her own needs), but her belief itself is real. Winn’s hypocrisy is buried so deeply it barely even qualifies to be described as such. Her conviction in the Prophets’ righteousness is the cornerstone of her identity; but since that identity is also predicated on the assumption that she and she alone should hold the reins of Bajor’s destiny, there’s none of the enlightenment or generosity that we see in, say, Kira’s devotion. Winn comes first, the Prophets just barely second, and the only

reason that hasn't been a problem for her in the past is that the word of the Prophets allows room for interpretation.

Both of this week's episodes follow Sisko and Winn as they make important decisions, for reasons which fit well with both characters. The results will have to wait until next week; for now, all we have to go on are the journeys that lead them to turn their backs on the Prophets.

Of the two, Sisko's situation is the most challenging. With Kai Winn, the "right" answer is clear enough; her greed and ambition have kept her at arms length from her gods, and if she really wanted to repent, she'd follow Kira's advice and step down. That she doesn't is both inevitable and a little sad, but it's not as if she's treading in confusing moral waters. For Sisko, though, life is more difficult. Just at the moment of his greatest happiness, he gets a message from the Prophets that he shouldn't marry Kasidy. Not because their union is evil, not because Sisko is doing anything wrong, but because the marriage will only end in "sorrow."

That's it; no further explanation is offered, apart from the standard boilerplate of vague, indefinite foreshadowing. Which is what makes the problem so difficult. Telling your lover that you have to cancel the wedding because an alien being who can see through time told you that you should is never going to be an easy conversation. But because of the Prophets' apparent inability to speak in clear, direct language, Sisko has no concrete reason to obey their wishes other than the fact that they've done right by him in the past. Winn's struggle is with the gods who have ignored her; Sisko's is with gods who pay just enough attention to him to make his life terribly confusing.

What troubles me about all of this, in a way that Winn's story doesn't, is that dramatic convention demands that the Prophets' warning prove correct. Given the seriousness of "Sarah's" words, I wouldn't be surprised if Kasidy ends up dead, in some way that can be laid more or less directly at the feet of Sisko's choice. (Like, I dunno, if Winn decides to try and attack the Emissary, and it all goes horribly wrong.) And if that does happen, and if it turns into a chance to dramatically punish Sisko for going against the Prophets' will, there's a cruelty there that doesn't sit well with me.

Not cruelty from the Prophets themselves—they're nearly always more interested in observing life than taking action, and everything "Sarah" told Sisko sounded like the words of someone who knows a bad time is coming, not a threat so much as prophecy—but from the writers. There's something sadistic about putting a character in this position, because there's no choice he can make that won't in some way destroy his life. If the warning had something weightier behind it than poetry, the situation would be less torturous; painful, but at least then Sisko might know the reasons why he's turning away from the woman he loves. As is, right or wrong, his decision to go ahead with the wedding is the only decision he really could've made. Knowing that this will almost certainly lead to heartbreak loads down the ceremony (non-Bajoran) with a heavy sense of portent. It's drama the presents the illusion of choice but which is really driven by inevitability. That can work amazingly well, but right now, it has me sort of terrified.

Winn's transformation is more straightforward, and more immediately satisfying. I love how so many of her scenes over the course of these two episodes are just her and Dukat, hanging out in her room, all intimate close-ups and flirting. Winn's choice is the end result of a carefully constructed con-job, but it's a con which relies on long-established resentments and insecurities to work. Since her

introduction to the series, Winn's self-regard and ambition have always come into conflict with Sisko's role as the Emissary, and while her star has risen considerably over the years, there's just enough self-awareness in her to realize that whatever position she achieves, however much power she attains, Sisko will always be closer to the Prophets. He'll always matter more. Until now, given Sisko's general detachment from regular Bajoran life, this is a conflict that's been left on the back burner. To bring it out now, and for the enemies of Bajor to use it against her, is some smart scripting.

Or maybe I'm just a sucker for Dukat—I'm sorry, "Anjohl" and Winn's burgeoning romance. While Dukat's turn as a cult-leader hasn't been the greatest character shift in the show's history, his manipulation of Winn works well, moving him from the conflicted, "Am I lying or am I not?" confusion of his previous appearance and returning him to full-fledged villain status. There's a clarity to his behavior now that makes him more compelling to watch, and it's fun (in a mean sort of way) to see how easily Winn is played; how much her ego makes her vulnerable and open to this approach. Watching this unfold over the course of two episodes, and seeing how cleverly Dukat handles his role, is as exciting as Sisko's trajectory is unsettling. Both Sisko and Winn are heading for a fall, but only one of those falls will be deserved.

Ezri and Worf in captivity: a non-rom-non-com

Sex or no sex, the odds of Ezri and Worf becoming a romantic couple were slim to none. My biggest complaint was that the actual mechanics of building to that one-and-done night together were hamstrung by cliché and a lack of notable chemistry between the actors. For Ezri and Worf's irritation with each other to bubble over into sexual desire, there needed to be something like legitimate passion in their exchanges, however corrupt and fundamentally unworkable. As it was, Ezri was snippy and Worf was grumpy, but the attempts to escalate this played more as a conceptual choice than anything stemming from character. For the sex itself to happen after a "I just slapped you, now we have to make out!" scene is just adding insult to injury.

Thankfully, this week's pair of episodes do the necessary work of getting Ezri and Worf to where they should've been all along: friends, without benefits. To make this happen, the two go through some torture at the hands of the Breen, some soul searching, the discovery that Ezri is actually in love with Bashir (which... okay), and the stunning reveal that the Breen is now working with the Dominion, in a move which, we are assured, will almost certainly end the war. Hold on to that last for now: the important bit is that Ezri and Worf are in captivity together for an extended period of time, and that forced proximity allows them to work through some issues.

These issues aren't exactly surprising. Post-sex, Worf immediately decides that he and Ezri are going to be married; and when he finds out that Ezri has feelings for someone else, he starts accusing her of using him and breaking his heart. Which is very typical for Worf. Ezri, for her part, tells him to back the hell off. While it's fine to see that she's not cowed by his stridency, and that Worf in turn is willing to back down and relax once the initial embarrassment wears off, this hasn't been the most effective of subplots. By and large, switching to prolonged serialization has been a boon for the final weeks of the show. It benefited Winn's storyline immensely, and gave Sisko's internal struggles time to breathe. But the conflict between Ezri and Worf was a non-starter, something that made sense when Ezri was first introduced into the cast, but which should've been resolved a long time ago. It's great to see them

working as a team, and I'm much happier with where this arc ended up than with where it began, so let's just move on.

Damar: An Appreciation

For the longest time, Damar was a write-off; a thug, a second-in-command, a drudge who followed orders, loved his homeland, and didn't have a sense of humor about anything. Working alongside Dukat, Damar was stuck in the necessary, but not especially thrilling, position of head hench. Dukat made the crazy schemes, the big plans, the bold jumps, and Damar ran alongside him, occasionally looking pained, generally just getting the job done. Then Damar killed Ziyal, and it seemed like he might become some kind of psychopath, broken by his inability to reconcile his twin loyalties to Dukat and Cardassia.

That's not quite what happened. I'm sure at least part of the reason why Damar drinks is guilt over Ziyal's death, but her murder hasn't been a topic of conversation for a while, and Dukat didn't even mention it when he came to visit. What's really driving Damar to distraction is the deal with the Dominion, and the ways in which that deal has slowly but steadily eroded the pride and identity of Cardassia. Dukat is an opportunist; like Winn, he values himself above his people. Damar, though—Damar is a patriot. And these seem like bad times for a patriot.

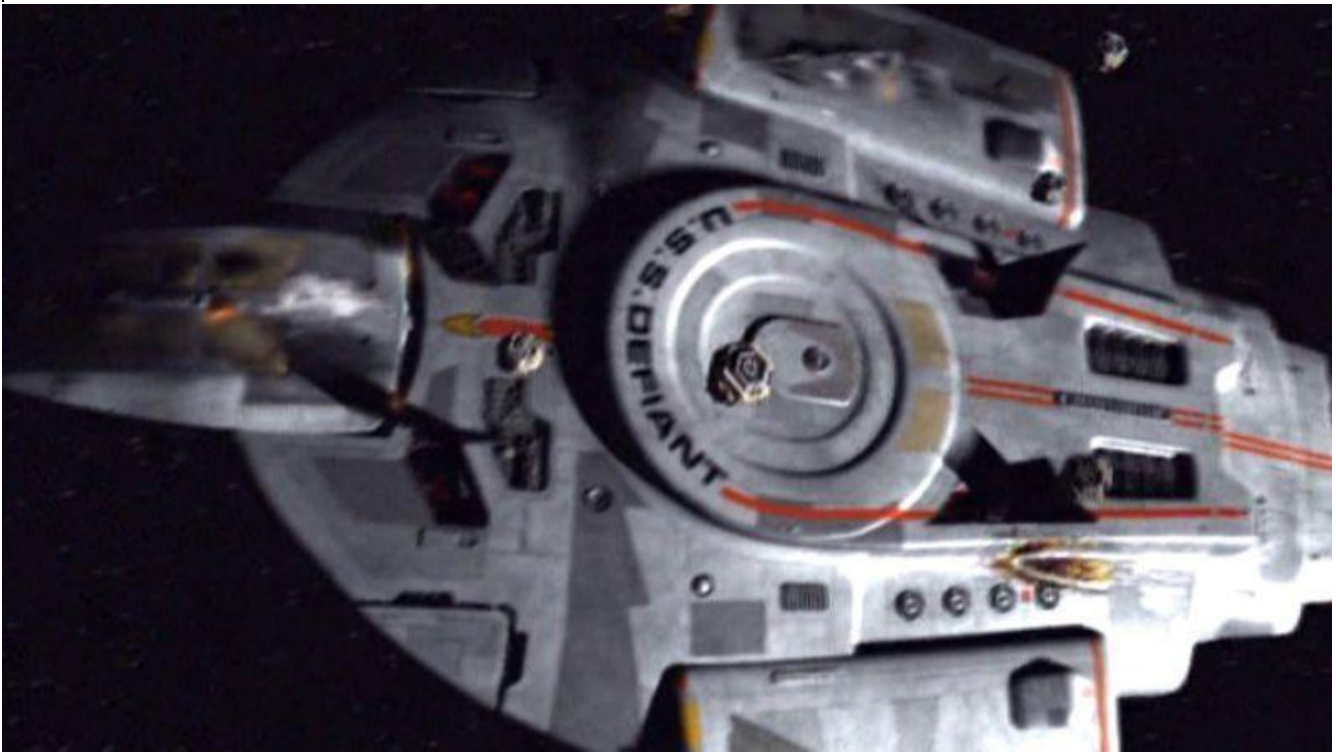
All of which comes to a head in the second half of this week's double feature, in a way that manages to be both unexpected, inevitable, and thrilling. Throughout the season, the writers have been inserting occasional exchanges between Damar and Weyoun; few of these exchanges have lasted very long, and most of them have simply served to show that the two characters aren't getting along so great. Their relationship, and Damar's clear rage over his situation, seemed static. Damar was introduced as a follower, not a leader, and when he took over Dukat's position as ruler of Cardassia, he wasn't so much getting a promotion as he was transitioning to a new boss. What's so impressive in retrospect is how all those earlier scenes, which were bitterly comic and sort of casual in their way, work to justify Damar's big turn.

Not that this week's episodes don't do a large part of the work as well. The deal with the Breen is a bad sign for Cardassia; the Dominion is a group designed for victory above all else, and when they start looking to bring in new allies, it's a sign that old relationships are getting downgraded. It's a point made well, if not exactly subtly, by Weyoun's relationship with Thot Gor, the leader of the Breen. Thot has some ideas on how to run the war; Weyoun loves all his ideas; Damar watches 500,000 Cardassians die and fumes in the corner. With his bounty-hunter-esque mask and electronic voice, Thot's presence is largely a sight gag, but it's a good sight gag, and it's not hard to understand how the Breen's presence is a tipping point.

So what does Damar do? He helps Worf and Ezri escape. It's narratively convenient, but it makes sense: an act of concealable rebellion that allows Damar to offer a hand to the only group that can possibly get Cardassia out of this mess. Plus, Worf did recently snap a Weyoun's neck, which I'm sure raised him at least a point or two in Damar's estimation. Things are starting to pull together. Winn has gone to the dark side; Sisko has taken a step down a difficult path; the Dominion has allied with the Breen; Worf and Ezri are racing home; and Damar has decided to take a stand. Something's coming into view. We just don't know what it is yet.

Stray observations:

- One nitpick: while we've seen the Breen before, this is the first time we've heard about their incredible value as an ally. The reveal that the Female Changeling has brokered an alliance with them comes less as a shock and more as a "Oh, I guess?" moment.
- I wonder what the hell the Breen look like under those masks. And I wonder if we're going to find out before the end.
- Kira's strong faith is in full force this week, and whether intentional or not, I appreciate how the writers are willing to let her look slightly unsympathetic. Her conversation with Winn had her on the side of the angels, but her "It doesn't work like that and you know it" to Sisko in his time of crisis is frustrating in its unhelpfulness. But then, that's probably just my deep distrust of a religious system which demands great sacrifice from its followers without any clear justification or apparent respect.
- Bashir and Ezri, huh? I was spoiled on this (if you can call it spoiled, which I really don't), and don't really mind one way or the other. I don't think it was necessary for Ezri to hook up with anyone on the station, and I'm not sure how that romance is going to play out in the brief (sob) time we have left. On the other hand, if Ezri and Bashir do make sense together. So, sure.
- "When I made love to you, my motives were not spiritual." Oh Worf.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Changing Face Of Evil”/“When It Rains...”[Zack Handlen](#)[4/10/14 10:00AM](#)

“The Changing Face Of Evil”/“When It Rains...” (season 7, episodes 20-21; originally aired 4/28/1999, 5/5/1999)

After a banner double feature last week, this week’s two episodes find *Deep Space Nine* sinking into something like stall mode. Or not a “stall,” exactly, but the rising action moves through “The Changing Face Of Evil” and “When It Rains...” in fits and starts. There are moments of revelation and action, but they sit cheek by jowl with character bits that serve mostly to hold the space before the next big calamity. Some of this works, and yet nearly all of it feels like set-up, as so much of these episodes do. Serialization is great for world-building and establishing relationships, but the drawback is the constant push to move forward. Everything that happens just turns into something that happened on the way to something else.

Basically, too much serialization and episodes start to lose cohesion as individual units; they instead become collections of scenes which only have value when put together with a bunch of other scenes we won’t see until next week, and the week after that. If you’re telling stories on television, you need to use the episodic structure to your benefit. Otherwise, it’s just a bunch of stuff that happens. Some of it might be more interesting than other stuff, but a show can’t really survive on a few good scenes. There needs to be cohesion—and ironically, that push for cohesion, for a sense of a greater overarching narrative, is what drives writers to serialization in the first place. But enough empty theory talk, let’s break this down.

This Is How You Lose Me: Winn and Dukat

Oh hey, here's another subplot I was happy to watch develop which ultimately turned around and bit me in the face. I need to stop doing that.

Look, there are elements to like about Winn and Dukat's slow, painful falling out. Viewed in broad terms, there's a certain poetry to Dukat finally being punished for trying to rise above his station; and Winn's descent into evil is convincing, in that she's unhappy and frustrated, and then horrified when she learns Dukat's true identity—but that horror doesn't stop her from murdering her subordinate and pushing forward with her research into freeing the Pah-Wraiths. All of this seems pretty necessary to happen, in terms of wherever the hell this is going. By which I mean, there aren't any major character missteps, and I'm guessing the Pah-Wraiths are going to factor into the show's end game.

But as it plays out, all of this takes much too long, with too many scenes of Solbor fretting over Winn's infatuation with "Anjohl," and too many scenes of Dukat trying to soothe Winn with promises that everything will work out fine in the end. A certain monotony sets in, and while Solbor's death certainly adds a jump, it still doesn't transform what's basically just two people sitting in a room squabbling about abstract philosophical concerns. Oh no, the book of evil! Oh no, Winn is turning her back on the Prophets! And so on and so forth. No matter how worked up Louise Fletcher gets (and she does a very good job of showing Winn's mind shattering and then reforging itself), these are still ideas without, as of yet, practical or immediate value.

The reason that Dukat's seduction of Winn worked so well was that there was an actual, clear conflict: the struggle for Winn's soul. You could argue that's still abstract (I mean what the hell is a soul, anyway), but there was suspense and fascination in watching Dukat strip her of her principles without her knowledge. The tension came from wondering if Winn would realize what was happening before she went too far, and then, if maybe this was secretly what Winn had wanted all along—the chance to forge her own path, her own religion, with presumably herself as a centerpiece.

Technically speaking, "The Changing Face Of Evil" has some of this tension, as Winn doesn't realize what Dukat is doing until Solbor breaks the news about his Cardassian DNA, and even then, still has the chance to turn things around for herself right up until the moment where she stabs Solbor in the back. (This is one of those semi-forced big turning points where you know what's coming, and you can see it coming for a long time, and it's really by the grace of Fletcher, who does this half-stunned, half-terrified thing, that it works as well as it does.) But her decision was essentially already made, and even learning the truth doesn't alter Winn's course very much.

It should be freeing, at least initially, to see the Kai embrace her inner villain. And there is some satisfaction to see her turn the tables on Dukat, albeit in a way which is less cleverness on her part than it is taking advantage of a magical mishap. Maybe that's the real problem here: the "magic." Once Winn has made her choice, the focus of the story shifts from character to mythology, and that's rarely an upgrade. Winn spends most of her time in these episodes, when she isn't murdering people or kicking former lovers who are now blind out into the street, doing research. Research in a "forbidden book," no less. Forbidden books are always a warning sign, culturally speaking, and this subplot leans far too much on taking what should be a metaphor and making it literal fact.

This might've played better if stripped down to a single episode; as is, stretched to two, there's too little urgency, and we're allowed too much time to contemplate everything, and wonder if it's possible

for the show to put too much emphasis on mysticism over science. In the past, Sisko's dealings with the Prophets have straddled the line between the two ideas well enough, but an evil book which zaps someone in the eyes and makes them blind even though there's nothing medically wrong with them—that's something else entirely. As great as Fletcher is, Winn just isn't that compelling enough to justify this much screentime, and regardless of how important all of this will be to the finale, too much of this feels unnecessary and prolonged.

Do you hear the Cardassians sing?

Well, Damar is on one heck of a winning streak. Deciding to take a stand against Weyoun and the predatory grip of the Dominion, the daughter-killing former drunk manages to mount an impressive, if somewhat limited, rebellion. And for one episode, it's badass. First Damar finds himself a second in command—Damar's Damar, so to speak—then, with impressive speed and resources, he launches an attack on a cloning facility in Cardassian territory, before announcing to the empire his intentions to beat back the Dominion forces. Whereas so much of these final episodes has been marked by steady, patient plotting, Damar's actions in "The Changing Face Of Evil" come in a rush, and serve partially to balance the crushing defeat the Federation receives at the hands of the Breen three-quarters of the way through the episode. Everything may be turning to shit, Damar's speech seems to say, but if the Cardassians can become allies, who knows what might happen?

As with Winn, once Damar makes his choice, the character dynamic shifts from the tension to decision, to all forward momentum. But where Winn's decision to go full Pah-Wraith was hindered by her doubts, Damar has no such compunctions; there's a thrilling straightforwardness to him, a clarity that makes him exciting to watch. After a season or two of watching him drink himself into a stupor while Weyoun quips from the sidelines, Damar has finally grown himself a spine, and it's a development as unexpected as it is exciting.

The excitement pales a bit in "When It Rains..." as the focus shifts from Damar to Kira. Cardassians may be great fighters (at least, I've always assumed they were), but they aren't very good at guerilla warfare, especially not with old bull-in-a-china-shop Damar leading things. Once the Federation makes contact with the Cardassian resistance, Sisko decides they need to send someone into Dominion territory to make contact with Damar and the others and give them a schooling in how to be sneaky terrorists. He decides Kira is the only choice, and orders her off, accompanied by Garak (naturally) and Odo (again, naturally).

Conceptually, this has potential. There's something almost narratively sadistic about putting Kira in a position where she has to teach her former oppressors how to free themselves from oppression, especially given Damar's involvement. As Kira reminds Sisko, she considered Ziyal a part of the family, and her death at Damar's hands is a crime that remains unpunished. Tensions pop up in various places once Kira and the others arrive at the camp, with various Cardassians chafing under Bajoran counsel, especially when Kira explains to them that they're need to be willing to attack their own people if they want to have any hope of success.

The problem is again one of serialization; all we get in "When It Rains..." is set-up, scenes which establish why both sides would be reluctant to work together, but without any of the necessary pay-off to that reluctance. Either the Cardassian resistance will win a victory thanks to Kira's advice, or

they'll turn on her. Neither of these have happened yet, so instead of a story with a beginning, middle, and end, we get something that starts and builds but doesn't really end up anywhere.

Compare that to, say, Damar's decision to turn on the Dominion. First, we get the great scene of him helping Worf and Ezri to escape; and while that scene sets up what's to come, it also serves as a conclusion to Damar's arc with Weyoun. The next episode tells the story of Damar building his rebel army and their first big assault. While that's a piece of a larger tale, it functions on its own as a coherent narrative. Damar's speech to Cardassia serves to drive the larger story forward, but it also serves just fine as a conclusion; the break which began in the previous episode is now complete.

Kira's struggles in the Cardassian camp didn't need to be as dramatic or as impactful, but there should be at least some sense that things have reached a temporary conclusion, however unstable. Which is something that comes up often in these two episodes, especially the second. It must be challenging to plot out events over so much time, but that doesn't make it less frustrating to watch decent but middling plots drain away the urgency. Maybe a refusal to provide even an illusion of closure is an attempt to keep building the tension until it peaks in the finale, but right now, that's not what's happening.

Goodbye, Defiant.

The Defiant done got blowed up. That was sad.

...okay, I probably say more than that, but really, as much as I liked the stories that ship made possible, I wasn't particularly attached to it. I liked what it represented, I guess—the show striking outward from its home base, and the greater narrative investment in the Dominion War. But as an actual vehicle, it never really inspired much affection in me. Maybe I'm just not as impressed by the trappings of sci-fi shows as I should be. Kira getting a Starfleet commission mostly just made me realize that she didn't already have one. Then I promptly forgot about it, until just now.

But hey, the space battle in which the Defiant goes down was great, and it was good to finally get some hard evidence on the prowess of the Breen. This is totally the kind of ending I was talking about above, and it will be interesting to see how the loss will affect Sisko's place in the final days of the war. Hard to be a captain when you don't have a ship.

Ezri and Bashir and—oh, I'm sorry, I was going to say more but just happened to be cut off by a painfully contrived convenience.

Seriously, either have them hook up or don't. This “Bashir thinks Ezri is in love with Worf, and before Ezri can explain otherwise, something something” crap is the worst.

Section 31, Section 31, What Have You Done

They created the virus which is killing the Changelings, for one. And worse (at least from our perspective), they used Odo to do it, infecting him during his last check-up at Starfleet medical, which in turn allowed him to pass on the illness when he linked with the Female Changeling. I'm not sure how the timing of this works out, but if I had to guess, I'd say it seems like Section 31 didn't have any concrete reason to believe that Odo would be linking with the Founders any time soon. They just

made him sick on the chance that they might be able to use him to murder his entire race. Which is cool.

Bashir discovers all this when he finds that Odo actually has the sickness after all; in the good doctor's efforts to get ahold of Odo's medical records, he uncovers conspiracy which leads him to deduce a Section 31-orchestrated cover-up. (He works most of this out while talking with Miles in Sick Bay, and since we're talking spin-offs, I really want a show about Bashir solving medical mysteries, and O'Brien hanging out with him. Like *House*, only the lead isn't an ass.) There's no definitive proof of any of this, but it sounds too plausible not to be true, and we're getting awfully close to the wire to start introducing fake conspiracies.

This is one of those revelations which I suspect will work better for me in retrospect. There's plenty to like about it. For one, it has Bashir finally figure something out ahead of the bad guys (at least, I'm assuming that him discovering the source of the Changeling sickness isn't some epic mind fuck), and it's nice to see the character get a chance to learn from the past, and not always be the idealist who only realizes the universe is rotten too late to change anything. And this makes sense, in a way a more outlandish or unexpected resolution arguably wouldn't have. The last we saw Sloan, he was already looking forward to where the Federation would stand after the Dominion War, and while part of that is just the character's inherent arrogance, knowing that he had every reason to believe that the Founders wouldn't be around much longer helps justify his attitude.

Yet as it stands right now, I feel a little disappointed. There's something so inevitable about the reveal that it loses a lot of the surprise, and the discovery doesn't actually tell us anything we didn't already know. Section 31 is a bunch of murdering creeps who'll commit any atrocity if it will help them achieved their perceived goals. Gasp. I'm not even sure Bashir's discovery is supposed to be surprise; it's presented straightforwardly enough, albeit with some Kafkaesque dark comedy as Bashir tries to track down Odo's medical records. Regardless, it's a perfectly fine twist, and one which it will be interesting to watch play out over the final weeks. Unless Odo dies. I will be very sad if Odo dies.

Sisko and Kasidy squabble a bit because, uh, stuff—hey look, it's Martok!

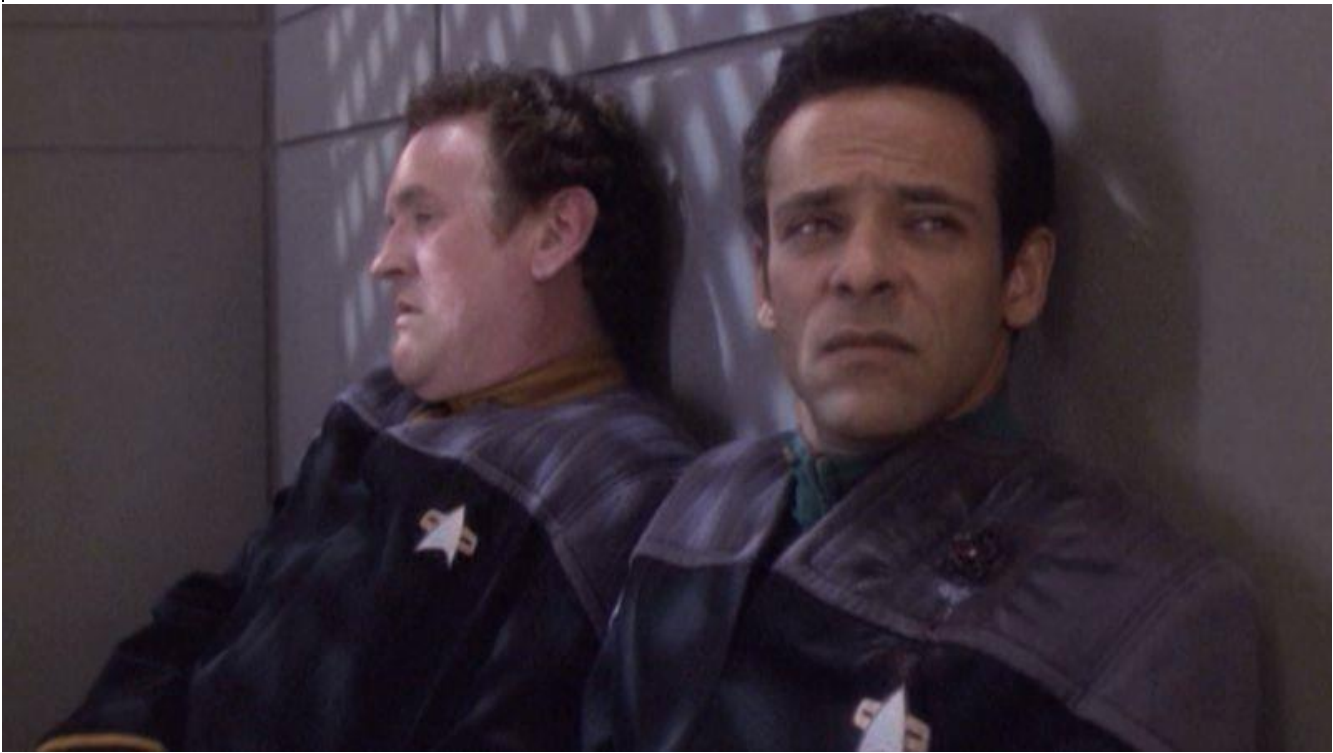
No one cares about the Sisko and Kasidy scenes, which are falling into pretty predictable married couple stuff, albeit with the added bonus of Sisko using his power as an officer to try and "protect" his wife in ways she doesn't want protecting.

Really, though, I can't finish this review without mentioning Martok, who gets inducted into the Order of Kahless, only to find that Gowron is using the occasion as an excuse to take command of the Klingon fleet. Which is a dick move on his part, motivated by jealousy over Martok's status in the Empire as the best damn Klingon there is. Like so much else this week, this is set-up without pay-off, which makes it intriguing, but frustratingly unfinished. But at least the fact that Gowron is leading everyone into disaster at a time when the Klingon forces are even more critical than usual makes for a good cliffhanger. That's probably the best and worst that can be said for this week: lots of plot shifting, some revelations, some fine moments, and a good cliffhanger. Fingers crossed all these dominos start tumbling soon.

Stray observations:

- Oh, Ezri and Worf made it back to the station just fine, thanks. Also, the Breen attacked Earth, which is both devastating and kind of embarrassed for Federation forces.
- Winn's research into how to release the Pah-Wraiths from the fire caves is not really information we need. It's the sort plotting that gets caught up in the how when all that matters is the why.
- O'Brien and Bashir are really delightful this week, what with their Hardy Boys routine and O'Brien's ultra-detailed model of the Alamo. (That said, Worf's obvious disdain for the model was also really funny. Not that all that tiresome "one last shag" is behind them, Ezri and Worf make good friends.)
- Weyoun's realization that Damara specifically targeted the cloning facility to punish him is a fine bit of acting from Combs.
- Quark hasn't had much to do lately, for understandable reasons, but the scene with him bringing coffee to Bashir and O'Brien because they were trying to help Odo was nice.

Next week: I'm on vacation next week, so we'll have to pause our rush to the finish line for just a little bit longer. But we'll be back April 24th with "Tacking Into The Wind" and "Extreme Measures."

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “Tacking Into The Wind”/“Extreme Measures”Zack Handlen4/24/14 10:00AM**“Tacking Into The Wind” (season 7, episode 22; originally aired 5/12/1999)***In which Worf does what needs to be done...*

You want to talk about call-backs? “Tacking Into The Wind” features the semi-resolution of a plotline that’s been a mainstay of the *Trek*-verse for years; it goes back, in fact, all the way to the first season *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode [“Heart Of Glory.”](#) I wouldn’t go so far as to say that what happens in “Tacking Into The Wind” had been planned from the start. I highly doubt it had, and the idea that television storytelling needs to have everything set in stone before the first episode begins is a pernicious, harmful fallacy. But “Heart Of Glory,” which was *TNG*’s first real attempt to give Worf more to do than glowering, introduced the concept of a Klingon Empire torn between the dictates of its warrior culture, and a slow, inevitable shift towards peace.

This conflict, and the way it allowed for an increasingly corrupt central government (in that Klingons were so eager to believe they could still be their old conquering selves that they’d put up with just about anything from their rulers), defined Worf’s arc through both *TNG* and *Deep Space Nine*. And in this episode, it finally peaks as Worf, sick of Gowron’s bad leadership and petty jealousies, challenges the chancellor to a duel to the death.

As arc closure go, it’s more of a “Oh, nice” than a grand operatic conclusion, but it’s still thrilling to see *DS9* do its best to close things out on a high note. Worf’s earlier conversation with Ezri (a conversation which inspires him to eventually challenge Gowron after Martok refuses to do it himself) allows the counselor to put as neat a bow on the situation as you might like; and while Ezri’s short summation of

the situation could've played as an over-simplification, it comes across instead as a gratifying moment of clarity, for both Worf and the audience.

The Klingon Empire is dying. Empires tend to do that, especially if they can't adapt. As brave and passionate and frequently entertaining as Klingons can be, "adaptation" isn't their strong suit. After all of Worf's efforts to hold back the inevitable, Ezri forces him to face the truth. Gowron is a symptom of a deeper problem. Dealing with him, as satisfying as that is, will only delay the inevitable; the Empire needs a leader who is capable of bringing his people together and working with outsiders towards a new future. Martok, with his low-born blood and all-around awesomeness, should fit the bill quite nicely.

The Klingons aren't the only empire struggling to rebrand itself. "Tacking Into The Wind" also pushes the conflict between Kira and the Cardassians to a head, and the results are more optimistic than one might expect. The episode as a whole shows the benefit of all the build-up that came before it, as for the most part we're able to cut to the heart of a crisis without needing to spend much time establishing the conflicts. We already know that Martok is frustrated and Gowron is insane, because we saw evidence of that in previous episodes; when Worf decides to take matters into his own hands, it's a culmination of conflict that's been around for longer than just this week. Similarly, the tension between Kira and Rusot has been well-established, and while that led to a sort of stasis in previous episodes, it means that when Rusot finally confronts Kira and makes the mistake of laying a hand on her, it plays as inevitable, and not forced.

Also helpful is how this episode establishes the real reason for Kira's work. Defeating the Dominion is the top priority, and her strategy and advice are key to establishing Damar's forces as an effective guerilla fighting team. But there's a question of what happens to Cardassia after the Dominion leaves, a question that hadn't really come up at all until Garak mentions it. Rusot, with his instant distrust of Kira and stubborn refusal to change, represents the old ways; cleverly enough, most of his objections are understandable (he doesn't want to risk Cardassian lives, and he's frustrated when Kira criticizes a successful mission for an obvious mistake), but the contempt which drives them isn't. In the little we've seen of Cardassian leadership (Dukat and the Obsidian Order among others), there's an investment in domination and control which can't go forward if the society wants to thrive.

This has all been such an inherent part of the Cardassian culture on the show that it never even occurred to me that it could change. But then, that's the hallmark of a great plot development, especially one that moves in the direction of optimism over pessimism. Damar's decision to finally stand up for himself and for his people has sparked a wave of reform in his soul that would've seemed utterly impossible a season ago, and it's impressive just how well the show manages to sell the idea that he might ultimately be able to make things better. It doesn't hurt that Garak is the first person to mention the idea. The tailor might not be the most trustworthy character on the show, but he knows (and loves) Cardassia as well as anyone, and when he tells Kira that Damar might be the last chance his people have left for a future, the statement carries weight.

Garak's words come after a short confrontation between Damar and Kira, one which sets up the episode's climax. After learning that his family has been murdered by the Dominion (he had a wife? Huh), Damar is shocked into wondering what kind of people would give such orders, would target

innocents in a perverted attempt to enforce “justice.” Kira, unable to stop herself, says, “Yeah, Damar, what kind of people give those orders.” It’s not a question.

This is the first acknowledgement between the two that Kira still remembers Ziyal’s murder, and even behind that, there’s the memory of all those years of Cardassian occupation behind her words. It’s a tense moment, as even Kira wonders if she may have gone too far, but it’s a necessary one. To fight and win against the Dominion is good and necessary goal, but if there’s a chance for something more than that, it’s worth striving for. Where before, Kira work with Damar and Rusot had seemed more designed to force her into close contact with people she despised, here the episode reveals the true purpose of the arc all along. Kira isn’t there to suffer, or even learn any lessons (unless she’s learning that even someone like Damar can change). She’s there to offer Damar a chance to recognize the mistakes and horrors of the past, and perhaps make it possible for something better to arise.

All of this comes to a head when Kira, Damar, Garak, Rusot, and Odo attempt steal a Breen ship. It’s a well-constructed suspense sequence (predictably, things go well right up until the moment when they nearly fall apart completely) that’s notable for two reasons: one, Rusot’s sudden, disastrous decision to end Kira’s involvement in the cause; and two, Odo’s collapse. The latter incident gives Odo and Kira a few nice moments together, but it’s the former that offers as a decisive a conclusion to Damar’s internal struggles as we’re likely to get. Rusot pulls a phaser on Kira; Garak pulls a phase on Rusot; and Damar, after hearing arguments from both sides, shoots Rusot. “He was my friend,” he explains, “but his Cardassia is dead and won’t be coming back.”

It’s as upbeat as a scene that ends in murder can be, although it’s tied for that status with Worf’s fight against Gowron. After having been such an important (if mostly unseen) part of the Klingon government for so long, it’s a little surprising to see Gowron go down, but it works, largely for the reasons stated at the beginning of this review (you can check if you like, I’ll wait); Worf deciding he has to take a stand is a pay-off that’s been a long time coming, and those few seconds in which he wears Gowron’s robe are thrilling stuff. But Worf has learned some valuable lessons over the years, and his decision to hand leadership over to Martok is also a culmination of a sort. Worf realizes that however much he might want it, he is not the man to bring his people together. Once again, he sacrifices personal glory for the sake of his people. There’s a lot of nobility floating around this week, and it’s notable that *DS9* manages to make so much of it authentically inspiring.

Stray observations:

- Garak is stays in the shadows for the most part, as his wont, but every scene he’s in is a great one. It’s fascinating how his history with both Odo and Kira affects their scenes together without the anyone ever feeling a need to remind us of that history directly. As much as I love Trek’s spirit of togetherness and cooperation, there’s something to be said for subtextual tension.
- Odo’s condition is so bad that I was very tempted to look up his fate online. I’m glad I didn’t, as it gets resolved in the very next episode. But it seems like a legitimately possibility that a member of the main cast might die before the end, which is not something I would’ve said while watching TNG. I don’t know if that in and of itself makes this a better show, but it does make watching these last few hours considerably more intense.

- Goodbye, Gowron! Ole Bug Eyes will be missed, I guess. I mean, in theory. You were a mediocre leader and a weasely bastard, but Robert O'Reilly made the most out of the character. His delivery of "He's expected to survive" was one of the best laughs of the episode.
- Kira and the others got hold of a Breen weapon! So, y'know, keep that in mind.
- The Female Changeling orders Weyoun to fill Dominion shipyards with Cardassian civilians, so that Damar's resistance will be forced to kill innocents in their effort to rebel. Yeah, she's a sweetheart. (She also informs the current Weyoun that he'll be executed as soon as the cloning facilities can be rebuilt. He did not appear to take this very well.)

"Extreme Measures" (season 7, episode 23; originally aired 5/19/1999)

In which Bashir and O'Brien go full Dreamscape...

You may have noticed that I didn't mention O'Brien or Bashir once in my review of the previous episode. They certainly have scenes in it. And they're good scenes, too! Very banter-y. But the majority of the Bashir/O'Brien action is in this week's second episode, which is the closest thing to a standalone that we've had in quite some time. Not only does the hour stick with one story, and tell that story largely through the perspective of its two leads, but the whole thing feels rather charmingly old school: a mind-fuck plot about the intrepid doctor and his faithful engineer companion (feel free to reverse this if you like) and their efforts to find a cure to Odo's disease by linking electronically with the contents of Sloan's dying brain.

DS9 has run stories like this before. Not this specifically, sure, but the sort of dream logic and mind games Bashir and O'Brien have to endure before finding their way to the truth have a pleasingly familiar ring, right down to the "Wait, what if we aren't actually out of the program?" twist. In the past, this predictability could've been a little tiresome, even with O'Brien and Bashir at the helm. With everything else that's been going on, giving up so much screentime to two characters could've seemed like a waste of time. But it doesn't come across that way.

Partly this is because the stakes are very high throughout, if not for O'Brien and Bashir (they're technically in danger of dying if they stay inside Sloan's head for too long, but c'mon), then for Odo. Along with everything else it did well, "Tacking Into The Wind" did a fine job of establishing just how sick Odo was, and doing it in such a way where it legitimately seemed possible that the constable might die. "Extreme Measures" reinforces this possibility by sticking Odo in what looks like an open coffin, giving him a tearful goodbye with Kira, and then having Bashir telling him he has a week, maybe two, left to live. It can be difficult for a show to try and generate extended suspense from a threat to a major character—spend too long on the threat, and it becomes comical, but end it too easily, and it becomes that much harder a trick to play down the line. But given how close we are to the series finale, it seemed all too possible that Odo might succumb.

That gives us a very good reason to care about what Bashir and O'Brien are doing, and the episode also does a good job of establishing why they have to do it. Bashir's genetically enhanced brilliance makes him potentially the only person in the universe who might have worked out a cure on his own, but even he needs time to work in, and Odo doesn't have any time left. So O'Brien comes up with a cunning plan: Bashir can send a message to Starfleet saying he's found a cure, even though he hasn't; Section 31, panicking that the cure might fall into the hands of the Changelings and ruin their plans, will have to send an operative to the station to destroy whatever Bashir's discovered.

It's devious, and there's something a tad uncomfortable about how quickly both Bashir and O'Brien latch onto the plan, and how they ultimately carry it out. The episode doesn't really offer any overt commentary on their behavior one way or the other (outside of Sisko doing his exasperated dad routine), but while I certainly don't like either character less than I did, I do think it's intentional that the choices they make be viewed with a certain amount of skepticism. We are informed at least twice that the Romulan mind scanners that Bashir obtains to dig the truth out of the Section 31 operative's brain are illegal; and if you remove the sci-fi trappings, Bashir and O'Brien are basically trying a form of torture, albeit one that keeps their hands largely clean.

That's the danger of trying to fight someone like Sloan. The tactics he has at his disposal seemingly require you to meet them with similar tactics of your own. It's very satisfying to see the look on the bastard's face when Bashir gets the drop on him. (Sloan makes the mistake of trying that appearing-in-the-bedroom trick, and Bashir is ready for him.) Sadler does a good job of showing what it might be like for someone like Sloan to be in a position where the control and detachment he depends on to do his "work" are no longer available. But there's something pathetic about him too. Not in a way that makes him sympathetic, but he's at least human. When Sloan chooses to kill himself rather than let the cure to Odo's sickness fall into the wrong hands (ie not his), he's operating under the grip of a kind of perverse idealism. He believes in his cause, right up until the end, and that's what made him dangerous.

The other reason why this episode works, I think, is because it plays a bit like an homage to similar episodes in the past; episodes which were maybe never quite as clever as the writers wanted them to be, but which still, in their silly, dreamy, occasionally twisted, belong to the heart of what *Trek* is. This is a franchise about exploration, after all, and while *DS9* chose to do its exploring from a political and social perspective more than frontier one, it still found time to poke into people's brains to try and figure out what makes them tick. I'm not sure what's in store for us in the final (sob) three hours, but it's entirely possible that this the last real crazy sci-fi premise we're going to get before the end. Maybe the Breen will turn out to be something special, maybe we'll get some technobabble; I have no doubt the Prophets will return, and we still have to deal with that Pah-Wraith craziness. But this could very well be the end of a certain kind of loopiness for the show, so that makes me inclined to view it more kindly.

Even if I wasn't so inclined, it is all pretty clever. The scene of "good" Sloan giving a speech to his extended family about how sorry he is that he let them all down is the sort of thing that takes a good actor to pull off, and Sadler handles it quite well; the twist that Sloan tricks Bashir and O'Brien into thinking they're out of his mind lasts long enough to be convincing (although the fact that it's Sisko and Worf who "rescue" them, not Sisko and Ezri, is a good clue); and the final confrontation in Sloan's brain office, as Bashir tries to collect all the information on Section 31 he can while the walls shake and fall around them, is a fine climax.

There's also time (a lot of it) for Bashir and O'Brien to banter, which is just fine by me. As great as the story has been these final weeks (and whatever my complaints, it has been great), the characters are what I'm going to miss the most. That's always the way it is with the shows we love the most. It's not grand opera or tragedy, but Bashir and O'Brien arguing over whether or not O'Brien likes Bashir more than he likes his wife.. that's just kind of perfect, y'know? Section 31 remains at large, though Sloan is

gone for good, and that's not really a surprise; organizations like Section 31 don't ever stay down for long. But the ending is hopeful nonetheless. Odo is saved (and that shot of him returning himself was delightful), and Bashir and O'Brien are still best friends forever. That'll do just fine.

Stray observations:

- I like how both O'Brien and Bashir are necessary to beat Sloan's brain: Bashir sees through the "we're still in his head" trick, and O'Brien makes Bashir let go of his need to have all the answers.
- Bashir tells O'Brien that he loves Ezri; later, when he sees Ezri while still a bit groggy, he tells her she's beautiful. They're just going to drag this one out till the end, aren't they.
- Unless the whole scenario was a lie (which is entirely possible), Sloan's first name was "Luther."
- No Dukat or Kai Winn this week! I didn't even realize they were missing until I sat down to write the review.

Next week: Thanks to the keen eyes of various commenters, we're going to adjust for the finale—next week, I'll be looking at "The Dogs Of War" alone; and then, the week after that, it's "What You Leave Behind," and the tears will flow.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “The Dogs Of War”[Zack Handlen](#)[5/01/14 10:00AM](#)**“The Dogs Of War” (season 7, episode 24; originally aired 5/26/1999)***In which Quark gets his dreams crushed and Damar rises to the occasion...*

It was the best of episodes, it was the worst of episodes. It was the tale of Damar’s rebellion finally reaching the people of Cardassia; it was the tale of the Ferengi and the Grand Nagus and a whole lot of nonsense. It was the—okay, you get the point. “The Dogs Of War” has two storylines and one subplot, and it is, by my rough estimate, about half a classic. Which is great, because half a classic is better than nothing, but the difference in tone and quality between Kira’s adventures on Cardassia, and Quark’s delusions of grandeur, are distracting at best, infuriating at worst. Even viewed as a whole, this isn’t close to a bad hour of television. It’s just, after the heights of last week, it’s disappointing to see the writers fumbling so close to the finish line.

It’s not hard to understand why certain mistakes were made, though. As *DS9* comes to the end of things, it’s only fair to try and give every major character on the show their own story before the end; not a send-off, per se (as I assume we’re saving those for the finale), but a tip of the hat to Sisko, Odo, O’Brien, and the rest, a way to reference and remind us of how much we’ve come to care about these characters, and how sorry we’ll be when they go.

Quark deserves this as much as anyone. Armin Shimerman is a terrifically talented actor, and he’s managed to make some of the show’s lousiest Ferengi-centric episodes work; over the run of the series, he’s ensured that Quark’s struggles have always come from a believable, centered place, even when those struggles were openly absurd. Comedy tends to work better when the fictional people

inside of it don't realize they're supposed to be funny, and no matter how implausible or foolish the situation became, Shimerman nearly always found some sort of truth in it. (We are going to leave ["Profit And Lace"](#) out of this, because the script was so fucked from the get go that not even great acting could save it.)

So I don't begrudge Quark getting one last chance to freak out over Ferenginar politics. And at least none of this was openly hateful or cruel. It's just pointless, and to give up so much episode time to it, while Kira, Damar, and Garak are fighting for their lives (and the Dominion War rages around them) only makes the nonsense that much more irritating to watch. I've read commenters complaining about this as a general problem in the final two seasons, but I'm not sure it's ever bothered me as much as it does in this episode. I can accept the occasional detour. Life goes on even in war-time, and I honestly prefer a series that mixes serialization alongside the occasional standalone, especially in a season this long. This, though...

The problem is that the whole premise is so dumb that you spend the entire time waiting for the other shoe to drop. Quark receives a transmission from Grand Nagus Zek informing him that Zek is retiring; Zek also seems to say that he's naming Quark as his successor. This is obviously not going to happen. Quark being falsely promoted to the Grand Nagus position is a premise the show has used before, and because the offer happens at the beginning of this episode, it's painfully clear that there's some twist we aren't seeing. (The twist: Zek thought he was talking to Rom.)

That's bad. Worse is that Quark is immediately and unquestioningly convinced that his dreams are about to come true. He's never been quite as clever as he thinks he is, but Quark is also not an idiot, and to watch him spend most of the hour preening about how rich he'll be, before getting upset when he learns of all the changes Zek has made in Ferengi law, is immensely frustrating. It's never a great idea to have an audience be this far ahead of a character, and the fact that no one in Quark's group of friends and relations even briefly questions what's going on is just dumb. Also, why the hell is Brunt there? Is he tapping into Zek's communications?

The real gag here is how Quark resists the progressive developments in Ferengi civilization, developments which, to any sane person, are clearly positive changes. This is a joke the show has done before, and Quark's "The line must be drawn here!" speech (which references Picard's speech in [First Contact](#); I guess it's intended as parody) is well-delivered and decently funny.

But none of this has any real place to go, and as theoretically delightful as it is to learn that Rom has become the ruler of his entire civilization, it's not worth the time it takes to get there. The joke that Quark is getting all inspired to defend brutal, unrepentant capitalism and everyone-for-himself corruption is played out, and Zek and Moogie have lost their charm. Amusing as it is to see Brunt (two Combs for the price of one) toadying up to Quark, these are just old routines, without any bite or purpose. Even Quark's discovery that he really isn't going to be the Grand Nagus has no spark to it. There's just no story left to tell here, and while the actors give it their all, and there's no obvious incompetence (it's even fairly well paced), the whole thing is a drag.

Everything else is quite good, thankfully. There are the little things, like Odo learning the truth about his infection—who caused it, and why. He's understandably upset, and the episode doesn't try to deny or put aside the intensity of his anger. As ever, the multitude of perspectives shines through: you have

Bashir, understandably proud of finding the cure, but not quite able to face Odo's frustration; you have Sisko, who orders Odo not to bring the cure to the Founders for reasons that are both horrible and make perfect sense; and you have Odo, faced with the idea that he inadvertently provided the means by which Section 31 could commit genocide. It's possible to sympathize with everyone here, and that sympathy puts the viewer in the uncomfortable position of not immediately knowing what the "right" choice is, a *DS9* hallmark.

There's also the resolution of the Ezir/Bashir arc; it's inconsequential (in that it's entirely cliché), but takes up considerably less time than, say, Quark's complaints about taxation. Bashir's giddiness throughout is fun to watch, and O'Brien and Worf's observational commentary is funny. And really, it's just good to get this all over with.

Finally, there's the real heart of the episode: the apparent destruction of Damar's rebellion, followed by a triumphant rise from the ashes. If I have any criticism to make, it's that the whole thing goes down very quickly. We start with Kira, Garak, and Damar visiting Cardassia to meet with new potential recruits, only to find the whole thing was a trap. The three escape, but their getaway vehicle is shot down. Garak finds a safe house in the basement of Mila, Enabran Tain's old housekeeper, and he and the others watch in horror as Weyoun announces the annihilation of all 18 of the Cardassian resistant cells.

It's a great set-up for a story, but given how much of its time the episode spends on *DS9*, it sometimes feels like we're getting the "greatest hits" version of everything that follows. But that's a minor nitpick, and one that I'm not even entirely convinced is valid; at this point, the show doesn't have the room to give us a long, drawn out ground rebellion, and besides, we've already spent a considerable amount of time watching Kira work with Damar and the others. The seeds have been planted. Now it's time for them to bear fruit.

And do they ever. After hearing from Mila that Damar has become a kind of folk hero to the masses (Weyoun claimed that he was killed, but no one on Cardassia appears to believe him), Kira decides that there's still a chance: if they can exploit Damar's status, and inspire the people to rise against their Dominion oppressors, the rebellion can still be won. She comes up with a plan to bring Damar back into the limelight, and after some suspense with a pair of Jem'Hadar guards, our intrepid band of freedom fighters blow up a Jem'Hadar barracks. Damar, after first killing one of the Jem'Hadar guards and then shielding some civilians from the blast—hero stuff that doesn't actually come across as calculated or forced—he gives a rousing speech. Then he and Garak are swept away by the triumphant crowd as Kira disappears into the shadows.

There's a lot to love about this. Damar's transformation from dull flunky and murderer to a man of deep principle and vision is complete, and it all made sense, every step of the way; a character arc which almost certainly wasn't planned from the start, but which flows naturally from beginning to end. Other characters have changed over the course of the series, but I'm hard-pressed to think of one who's changed as substantially as Damar has. Dukat went through a number of different roles, but his core remained corrupted and self-focused throughout. Damar, on the other hand, has developed an actual soul. The fact that so much of this played largely in the background of the final seasons just makes it all the more powerful. It catches you off guard. I've seen dozens, maybe hundreds of oafish

seconds-in-command in my years watching genre shows and movies, and they're always the first ones to get shot when the dying starts. Damar survived, and what's more, he learned from experience.

But while Damar is the most impressive accomplishment of this penultimate hour, Kira's arc is critical as well. The point was never to force Kira into a painful, and potentially deadly, situation. The point was to give her a chance to do for Cardassia what she'd done for her own people, and, in the act, transcend some of the horrors of her past. None of what happens with Damar will alleviate the violence and suffering of the Cardassian occupation, but there's a power to Kira first helping the Cardassians fight against their own oppressors, and then offering an example that reminds their new leader that the stakes are higher than mere freedom. While she'll probably never get the credit for it, Kira essentially sets the course for Cardassia's future (assuming that Damar's rebellion is victorious, which I'm guessing it will be), and that's fantastic. (Meanwhile, Garak, after a lifetime in the shadows, is getting pushing center stage next to the man who killed the woman he loved. Life, y'know?)

It's been a while since we've seen Sisko and Kasidy, but the final scene of the episode drops a bombshell. A nice bombshell, to be sure, but one with some unsettling implications. Kasidy is pregnant, and while I'm still leery about the Prophets and their vague warnings, Kasidy's utter terror at the thought that "the path of sorrow" might mean danger for their child helps to make an esoteric concept into something present and frightening. Any potential parents worry about the safety of their offspring, after all. Knowing that time-adjacent aliens have promised dark times ahead isn't going to make that worry easier to handle.

As we head into the series finale, only a handful of major plot threads remain open. The Dominion War is still ongoing; the Founders are still dying; Kai Winn is presumably still working on a way to release the Pah-Wraiths; and something something Sisko and the Prophets. That's a lot of material left to work through and still have time for a satisfying conclusion. But I have faith. Also, a lot of crossed fingers.

Stray observations:

- Neither Sisko nor Kasidy mentions the possibility of an abortion in their scene together, which got me to wondering: has abortion ever come up on a Trek series before? I don't think it's a huge lapse here, since they both want the child, but still, you'd think it would come up.
- Kai Winn and Dukat are once again not in this episode.
- There's a scene with the Female Changeling in which we discover she already knows that the Federation has developed an anti-Breen device. (So I guess some Changelings are still hidden away in Starfleet?) Her response is to try and close off the Cardassian borders and give her forces time to regroup and replenish themselves.
- Sisko gets a new *Defiant* at the start of the episode, which I'm sure we'll be seeing more of in the finale.
- "You never told me you had a secret mountain hideaway." -Garak. "I was going to surprise you." -Damar. (Dammit, now I want another spin-off.)
- Worf sending the turbolift with Ezri and Bashir making out on it back down is a very sweet little moment.

[Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: “What You Leave Behind”](#)



[Zack Handlen](#)

[5/08/14 10:02AM](#)

“What You Leave Behind” (season 7, episode 25; originally aired 6/2/1999)

When I was younger, I thought of life as a series of immovable objects. Here was home. Here was my bedroom. Here was my mother, my father, my sister; here was the school I went to, the backyard I played in, the books I read, the shadows at night, and the light in the morning. These were not passing fads. These were as solid as stone, and good and bad, they belonged to me. And yet at some point, the stone started to crumble. I can’t remember when that was, exactly. High school, maybe, and I didn’t even realize it at the time. One day the world was a series of unshakable truths, and the next, I was looking to college and fighting with Mom, and my sister and I didn’t speak the same language anymore. One day, home was a place that would always be there. The next, I was leaving. And now I’m leaving again, just like all of us.

“What You Leave Behind” is an imperfect series finale. Most series finales are. Writers and actors and directors go to great lengths to create a TV world in which each story folds neatly into the next one, and to suddenly have to shut everything down in a way that provides closure to multiple seasons worth of character and plot development isn’t easy. So we grade on a curve. If not every story twist works, if not every beloved cast-member gets the send-off they deserve; if some scenes lean a little too hard on easy emotions; if it’s not exactly what we’ve been dreaming of for however many years it took us to get to this point... we let it go. If enough is right, you let the rest of it go, with the understanding that sometimes, there are things more important than perfect grades.

There are definitely some bumps in this road, though. The end of the Pah-Wraith saga is functional without being in any way good. Winn and Dukat get their just desserts, but neither of their fates are thrilling or insightful. Winn gets burned up after doing the last semi-decent thing of her petty and miserable life (she yells at Sisko to go after the magic book, Pah Wraith Dukat's only real weakness; the helpfulness of this act is undercut somewhat by the fact that she'd earlier sacrificed Dukat and freed the Pah Wraiths herself), and Dukat is dropped into a firey pit, where he'll presumably hang out with the demons he loves so dearly until hell freezes over. Given all the build-up, this wasn't much of a resolution. Just some cheesy special effects, some mustache-twirling villainy, and a final confrontation about as morally complex as a Mighty Mouse cartoon.

But then, this was a plot thread that was never going to deliver, mostly because it didn't really belong on this show. *Deep Space Nine*, for all its Prophets and visions and prophecy, was always more interested in the complicated ways that people fit together than it was in god fights and prophecy. By the end, Dukat, Winn, and the Pah-Wraiths were bad guys out of a pulpy fantasy novel. In retrospect, Dukat really died when Ziyal did, when he was broken and conquered and all he'd fought for was lost. Everything that came after was a struggle to find relevance for a character who had reached his natural conclusion. As for Winn, she was compelling primarily when the writers were able to balance her hunger for power against her faith. Once that tension was lost, the doomed Kai had no place left to go.

Thankfully, Marc Alaimo and Louise Fletcher are both talented enough that their scenes together still have some spark, and what happens to Sisko after his confrontation with Dukat is pretty damn important—but put that aside for a second. There are things to do right now, so let's just move past the bumpy parts and focused on what worked. Because god, the road is so short, isn't it? Looking back now, it's like it's hardly there at all.

The Dominion War is over. It's over by the three-quarters mark of the finale, and the whole thing is both a tremendous victory and a horrible disaster, which is probably the most you can hope for from a war. The start of the episode has everyone gearing up to join Sisko on the new *Defiant*, for one last big push into Cardassian territory. It's a nice way to check in with the ensemble before the fireworks begin, and for a while at least, the finale does a fine job of being an ending without expending too much effort in reminding us that the end is coming. Sure, we find out that O'Brien has been offered a teaching job back on Earth, and that he's going to take it, which is very much a finale sort of thing to have happen. But there's no real conflict in this discovery, just O'Brien's reluctance to tell Bashir. Most everyone else is focused on the problems at hand: winning the war and surviving.

There isn't much in the way of grand speechifying or shocking twists, either. The writers even tweak our noses with some faux foreshadowing from Kasidy: "Reports of my death have been exaggerated... but not by much," she tells Jake, and it plays like an in-joke after all that worry over the Prophet's earlier warnings. Wouldn't it be ironic if Kasidy died, ha-ha. But c'mon. She isn't going to die. *DS9* had its darkness, but it was never the kind of show that would kill off a pregnant woman, especially not in the last episode. There's a strange sort of peace that runs throughout the finale, and Kasidy's comments fit into that peace. Almost like the writers were playing at being Prophets themselves, leaving us clues to comfort us that things may get bad, but they won't be hopeless. So hold on and enjoy, and maybe bite your nails a bit when things get suspenseful—but no one's going to break your heart. At least, no more than necessary.

Okay, let's get on point here: our heroes win the war. And that's good, right? The final space battle is a doozy, and the finale manages the neat trick of pushing victory back as far as it can go without turning it into a loss. It wouldn't have made sense if the Federation had lost the war now; it would've been a lousy ending for the series, and narratively speaking, given how much Sisko and the others have given to win, failure just wouldn't have worked. Yet there were moments here and there when a win seemed nearly impossible. The new *Defiant* takes heavy damage, and the combined might of the Breen, Jem'Hadar, and Cardassian fleet appears unstoppable. It's a neat trick to put a sure conclusion in doubt, but the show manages it, so that when victory finally does arrive (with the Cardassians turning on their former allies), it's all the more satisfying.

Not completely satisfying, though. If Sisko and the others' struggles in space are gripping, Kira, Damar, and Garak's fight on Cardassia comes perilously close to despair. There are a handful of deaths in "What You Leave Behind," but Damar's is the only one that really stings. I was sure that he'd survive the whole mess, survive and end up being the one to raise the flag of a new Cardassia out of the rubble of the old. But he gets shot down in a firefight as his small band of rebels is breaking into Dominion headquarters. It's sudden, although not so sudden that we don't realize he's gone. A season ago, I wouldn't have thought it possible, but I was sad when he died. It's an earned death (he did murder Ziyal, after all), but still nothing to cheer about.

But then, there's not a lot to cheer about on Cardassia even once the Female Changeling surrenders and the war finally ends. The damage starts early, when Weyoun has a Cardassian city leveled in order to punish Damar and the rebels for standing up to the Dominion. Two million gone, just like that, and it's a drop in the bucket by the end; before Odo merges with the Founder and she calls off her troops, the Jem'Hadar manage to murder over 800 million Cardassians, most of them civilians. It's a level of destruction that robs the victory of any sweetness. (Not that this bothers Martok. Man, I'm gonna miss Martok.) In his final scene with Bashir—and his final scene of the series—Garak can barely control his rage and sorrow over all that's been lost, from his beloved Mila to an entire way of life. It's possible to believe what Bashir tells Garak, that the Cardassians will recover and rebuild, but it's fitting that Garak's last act is to remind us that optimism only goes so far. 800 million dead is a number so staggering that no good faith or hope can really defeat it.

Like I said, though, this isn't a downer finale. In the end, somehow, Odo finds a way to reach the Female Changeling, and convince her to stand trial for her crimes. If we weren't still squinting, I'd say this reversal was a little too easy; the Founder had spent every appearance in this last season insisting with ever increasing fury that the Dominion would win the war, even if she had to kill everyone in her path to do it. In linking with her, Odo somehow reversed every major position she had, almost instantaneously, and she seems somehow different in her final scenes—not in a creepy way, but at peace with everything. The only other times we've seen her at peace was when she was trying to convince Odo to turn his back on his friends.

So maybe that's why she finally gave in. The war was lost anyway, and here was Odo, with a cure for the sickness that was killing her people, and a promise that he would return to the Great Link. Maybe that was enough to change her mind. The fact that it all happens so quickly, and with such seeming ease, makes it a curiously deflating resolution. All this time, the Female Changeling had been the

biggest boogeyman in an army of boogeymen. Her defeat should've been spectacular, cathartic; it should've allowed Garak the chance to satisfy his vengeance, at least. Instead, it's more like a sigh.

It's okay, though. It's not really what's important. What matters more is Odo's decision to return to his people, and his final goodbye to Kira. I'm still not sure what to feel about Odo leaving the solids behind. (I do know that I never stopped thinking "solids" was a silly term.) There's something so forlorn about it, so limiting and, from a certain perspective, weirdly defeatist; it's like watching someone escape a cult, build his own life, and then ultimately give up everything he'd built and retreat back to the womb of assimilation. But the event itself is treated in a positive, if bittersweet, light, and somehow, the fact that Odo's bringing his people the cure that will save them all makes the whole thing easier to take. I'm not sure why Odo suddenly decided that he could live without Kira, but their final moments together are lovely. You could read this as an over-simplification of all of Odo's time on the station, an easy answer to his quest for identity, and I couldn't argue with you. I think it works, though. I don't even have to squint that much. In the end, sometimes you just want to go where you belong.

I said we were going to talk about Sisko's fate, right? Because I was not expecting that. It's abrupt, and, on terms of plot, it feels perilously close to a cheat. Sisko gets everything he wants, but then finally realizes his purpose is to shove Dukat over a cliff; he does this, and wakes up in the white zone (for loading, unloading, and spiritual education), with some vague promises from Prophet Sarah that he has much more still to do. Later Sisko appears to Kasidy in a vision, to assure her that he isn't dead, and that he will probably definitely return at some point, "maybe a year from now, maybe yesterday," which, as scheduling goes, isn't even enough for an eVite. It's odd, and more than a little like the writers threw up their hands and said, "Fuck it, let's do some mystical shit," and tossed their protagonist into the ether.

Yet emotionally, it works, because it's ambiguous and uncertain and you just don't know what happens next. It's not hopeless; Sisko seems reasonably confident that he'll come back to Kasidy eventually. (According to Memory Alpha, this was at Avery Brooks' request. The original filming script left Sisko dead, never to return, and Brooks didn't like the idea of a black man leaving his wife pregnant with his child.) But when he does return, it will be different. In technical terms, you can think "Sisko died, and he's a ghost, and that's that," and it's not much of an ending. But if you think of it as something that's still happening, something that will, on a day we'll never see, become something new... It's not bad. Sisko was an angry man for a long time, but he doesn't look angry in his final scene. He looks like a man about to embark on some great new journey. So ignore the details that don't work, and go with what matters to you. Hold on to it tightly, and hope that it lasts.

There's more to talk about—those goofy flashbacks that don't so much tug on the heartstrings as they do rip them out of your chest; Quark's scene with Vic while he waits nervously for his friends to come home; Quark and Odo's final goodbye, which manages to be unsentimentally sentimental in a way that suits both characters perfectly; Worf becoming the Federation ambassador to Kronos, which is, all things considered, the best place in the world for him; Ezri and Bashir heading off to the Battle and Thermopylae; and so on. That's the thing about leaving, though. You keep grasping at reasons to stay for just a little longer, because it's dark out there, and a little colder than you were expecting, and what if we forget something. What if there's a moment or a performance, or a smile that we don't acknowledge, what if we leave out the one piece that would keep us warm for the long road ahead.

But it's time to go. So here: I cried watching this. I'm a soft touch, so that's no surprise. What is surprising is what made me cry. Out of everything—Damar's death, Odo and Kira, the end of a regular Thursday gig, whatever the hell happened to Sisko—what hit me the hardest was Bashir and O'Brien saying goodbye. It's such a small thing, comparatively. Nobody's dead, and they'll see each other again, I'm sure. It matters, though, and there's something remarkable in that; how in the midst of all the catastrophes and conclusions, something as minor as two friends letting each other go was important enough to make me weep. I mean, we've watched these guys meet and not really like each other, and then like each other and be kind of dorky about it, and was never epic, y'know? It was never something you'd sell in sweeps week, or put on a commemorative plate. Yet in all the extravagant chaos, this is the part that made the most sense: people spending time together until it's circumstances change. Because this happens all the fucking time. You find people, and you get to know them, and you love them a little. Hell, you love them a lot. And then, sooner or later, you go east, and they go west, and what you had is gone, and there's no way to get it back.

That's what this finale is about to me. Not the end of the war, or the death of some bad guys, but the reminder that there are so many stories that go on without us. Sisko, with the Prophets. O'Brien as a professor. Kasidy raising a child. Kira running the station. Jake staring out the window. Garak surviving. Quark hating change, running his bar, running his scams. Bashir and Ezri maybe getting married, or maybe just having a lot of great sex and burning out on each other. We won't know what happens next, because it's all made-up anyway; but really, we won't know because that's what life is. Life is the best friend from high school whose last name you can't remember. Life is the ex-girlfriend who kept a piece of your soul, and it burned until you realized there were so many pieces left you didn't miss it anymore. Life is the cousin who dies and maybe you saw her at Christmas that one year and maybe you didn't. Life is the status updates you don't understand, the phone calls you forget to return, the coffee dates that don't lead to anything more than a caffeine high. Life is knowing that however hard you try, however wide you open your arms, in the end, you'll leave everything behind you. Life is always leaving. And always leaving means that every friend you make is just one more goodbye.

It's worth it, though. In the end, little else is.

Stray observations:

Thank you very much for reading.

-Lewiston, ME 1/9/2009—5/8/2014